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Unruly School Spaces: an ethnographic exploration of Year
Eight student experiences of space, gender and well-being
in a South Wales secondary school.

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PhD

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Abstract

This thesis explores the ways in which one Year Eight class in a South Wales secondary school experiences space, gender and well-being in their daily school lives. Using space as a conceptual tool, the thesis uses qualitative and ethnographic methods to explore the ways in which children in Valley School may be involved in ongoing and iterative *spatial negotiations* within the course of the school day. It looks at the specific school spaces that these children occupy in the school, during different times of the day, and looks at the ways in which these *spatial negotiations* inform their gendered subjectivities and their sense of well-being in the school. The thesis draws on Doreen Massey's theorisations of space, as well as feminist ethnographic and qualitative research literature to help formulate understandings of the children's experiences of space, the importance of space in childhood, and the ways in which experiences of space and gender may be entangled, particularly in the school environment. Using this literature and the data corpus, I developed two descriptive, analytic concepts with which to thematically analyse the data generated for this thesis – the idea that the children are involved in 'nomadic negotiations of space' and the sense that these negotiations play out in an *unruly atmosphere*, which is specific and particular to Valley School. I also draw links between the macro educational policy landscape of South Wales, institutional pressures in Valley School and the micro everyday spatial and gendered practices of the children who study in Valley School. I aim to reframe the experiences of children living in a deprived area of South Wales, with significant socio-economic disadvantage, by using space as a conceptual lens through which to view their social practices, and I hope to inform educational research, policy and practice in Wales with these findings.

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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

The implicit assumptions we make about space are important... maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently (Massey, 2005: 1)

Space, then, for a child comes to fashion experience (Jenks, 2005: 75)

The quotes above foreground the central topics of this thesis: the way that space helps to ‘fashion experience’ for children in a specific institutional and regional setting. Perhaps if we were to rephrase Jenks’ quote to suit this particular thesis it would read ‘*school space*’. This thesis is concerned with the ways in which children’s everyday lives in a secondary school in the South Wales Valleys are constructed around and experienced through negotiations of school space. It is the contention of this thesis, based on ethnographic and qualitative data generated from six months spent with one Year Eight class in ‘Valley School’ in South Wales, that the negotiation of space forms a central part of these children’s lives and has an impact on their gendered subjectivities and their well-being in general. This thesis aims to contribute to the tradition of school-based ethnographic research in the UK. It attempts to provide a fresh look at children’s experiences of social life, gender and well-being by foregrounding their experiences of space. This is not a theoretical decision; the focus on space emerged organically through ethnographic fieldwork experiences. Indeed, the initial research design was focused around children’s experiences of violence and gender, not space. It was only through initial research experiences, and through spending time with the children at Valley School, that I began to see that it was their *spatial negotiations* that played a central part in their lives, with violence (in the traditional definition) being a far more marginal and occasional experience. Thus the adaptability of the ethnographic method and the methodology that underpins it (alongside literature on space, education and gender) allowed for a profound change in the research design and research focus of this thesis. This change in research focus will be discussed in greater detail later in this introduction, and referred back to throughout the thesis. For now, let us set out the terms of this research project and its aims and objectives.

1.2 Project Summary

This research project is based on data generated from fieldwork conducted across the first six months of 2015 in Valley School in South Wales. The research initially focused on teenage boys’ experiences of violence and masculinity. However, the focus of the research quickly

changed to a focus on how male and female children experienced space within Valley School, and how *spatial negotiations* informed their understandings of gender and their sense of well-being.

The project is particularly informed by school-based research with a focus on gender and other social experiences in the school. Therefore, it owes a debt to the rich discipline of feminist research on this topic (for example, Delamont, 1980; Walkerdine, 1989; Thorne, 1993; Renold, 2005) that has come before, and is influenced theoretically and methodologically by the ethnographic and qualitative methods that many of these key works used to understand the ways in which young people's gendered experiences and subjectivities are played out in the UK school environment. This project attempts to continue that methodological and theoretical tradition, and is also informed by post-structuralist (Foucault, 1980; Butler, 1990) and post-humanist understandings of gender, subjectivity and space (Braidotti, 2002; Taylor, 2013). Although drawn on only selectively, this theoretical underpinning allows for an understanding of the fluidity of gender subjectivities, and also sets the scene for the conceptual use of space and spatiality within the thesis.

The project uses Massey's influential works on space (Massey, 1994, 2005) to lay the foundation for an understanding of space as a dynamic, interrelated concept, and to understand the ways in which space can help to inform gender and gendered experiences. Explained further in the literature review, Massey's understandings of the interplay between space and gender inform the ways in which I view the children's experiences of space in Valley School, and the ways in which spaces change, physically and discursively, during the course of the school day and in different pupils' experiences.

The project aims to use analytical concepts around space to explore the ethnographic and qualitative data generated through the fieldwork. It aims to explore the specific pressures of negotiating space in Valley School, which was an under-funded and 'under pressure' school in an area of South Wales which has a lower socio-economic standard than much of the UK. It demonstrates the ways in which the children's micro-level, everyday experiences of space and gender are informed by macro-level, larger-scale instabilities and pressures within the institution of Valley School, and the surrounding local and regional educational policy environment. The interplay between these factors is informed by the concept of *spatial negotiations*, as the children have to negotiate temporary and permanent school closures within their school lives. This is explained further along in the thesis. I will now present the research questions that form the core of this thesis.

1.3 Research Questions

My research questions and sub-questions are as follows:

1. How do Year Eight (12-13) children experience space in a South Wales secondary school?
To what extent do these spatial experiences inform their experiences of gender and well-being in school?

Sub-questions:

- To what extent are children involved in an ongoing process of *spatial negotiations* during the course of the school day?
- How do girls and boys experience gender in different spaces in the school? To what extent do different school spaces inform students' gendered subjectivities?
- How can the experience of students' everyday lives in Valley School be characterised?
- To what extent does institutional disorganisation and regional educational policy affect the *spatial negotiations* that pupils are involved in?

This research question and its sub-questions foreground space in the lives of the children in Valley School. I followed one class during my research; as is common in ethnographic research, I focused in depth on a small number of pupils with the intention of generating a 'thick' account of their experiences seen, as far as possible, from the 'inside'. I decided to focus on the Year Eight age group as gendered subjectivities at this stage could be seen as more mutable and amorphous. Children at this age can be said to be in-between childhood and adolescence, and it felt more empirically pertinent to focus on this age group rather than older teenagers (with more research has been conducted on gender and schooling).

The main research question refers to the broad scope of the research project, taking in the key concepts of space and gender, and identifying the specificity of the research participants, institutional setting and regional location. These were all important parts of this research project: I aimed to understand the pressures for children in a school that was suffering from budget cuts, low attainment, enforced closure periods and low student numbers. I sought to explore the ways in which these pressures played out in this specific school and locality.

The sub-questions focus in on the specific elements of the research project. The first question identifies the concept of *spatial negotiations*. Using qualitative interviews and mobile methods I sought to understand the extent to which children were involved in an ongoing process of spatial negotiations throughout the school day. This question deals primarily with space, and in the analysis chapters I introduce the reader to the specific spaces that the children spend time in within Valley School: the outside spaces of the playground, rugby and football pitches and memorial gardens, and the inside spaces of the canteen and the music room. There is also an analytic section which explores the ways in which certain spaces within the school can be seen as

‘in-between’ spaces (Clark, 2010), particularly the corridors, and the ways in which these spaces are experienced by the pupils as involving extreme instances of unruliness and chaos at specific temporal junctures (the time moving between classes). I introduce two key concepts to analyse the spatial negotiations within Valley School: the idea that the children are involved in ‘nomadic negotiations of space’, and the potential existence of a pervasive *unruly atmosphere* within Valley School, characterised by physical and audible unruliness on a micro-level, and influenced by the institutional disorganisation as well as an unstable regional educational policy.

The second sub-question then seeks to look at the ways in which gender and space are related in the experiences of children in Valley School. Using the data corpus, I explore the ways in which discursive constructions of femininity and masculinity are implied and informed by the spaces that the children choose to spend time in during their breaks from class. I also explore the ways in which the children are involved in a process of ‘struggling to win some space for themselves’ (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 258) during breaks from class. Through the data I explore how the children attempt to lay claim to specific spaces in the school, and how these claims are always unstable and open to confiscation by other pupils, by staff and teachers, and by institutional policies. I explore the ways in which the girls particularly suffer from a lack of ‘legitimate’ spaces within which they can spend their breaks, and the ways in which there is a tenuous but tangible divide between those girls who spend time outside during breaks, and those who attempt to lay claim to inside spaces (particularly the music room) during these times. Within this exploration, notions of passive girlhood, masculine dominance and female embodied movement and experiences of space and femininity are teased out and analysed. I also look at the ways in which boys experience space within the school, and the ways in which masculinity is particularly implied within the spaces of the rugby and football pitches.

The third sub-question focuses on my observations of the idea that Valley School had a tangible *unruly atmosphere* that informed the children’s spatial negotiations and sense of well-being. This descriptive concept was developed during the research at Valley School, and aims to capture the sense of chaos and instability that existed in the school, whilst still understanding that unruliness is not as extremely negative or indicting as violence. When using the term ‘atmosphere’, I am drawing on the language of affect and emotion (Gorton, 2007: Ahmed, 2004) in order to describe a palpable but elusive feeling that pervaded the school. This concept of an unruly atmosphere draws specifically on Gorton’s description of the language of affect and emotion. She notes that many theorists working in this area “place importance on the way in which feeling is negotiated in the public sphere and experienced through the body” (Gorton, 2007: 334). This idea of an overlap between emotion (feeling) and embodied experiences in the public sphere (e.g. the school) characterises the concept of the unruly atmosphere. It was a

palpable embodied experience of a public institution, characterised by physicality, aggression, and noise, and felt subjectively by myself and (possibly) others in the school. This concept draws on earlier school ethnographies which often describe a school ethos or culture (Willis, 1977: Corrigan, 1973). I am attempting to use a similar concept but draw upon the language of new materialism and affect to better suit my theoretical framework. These key analytic concepts run through all three of the analysis chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six) and are used to illuminate the spatial experiences of the children in Valley School.

The final question highlights the institutional and regional policy factors, and attempts to understand the ways in which institutional disorganisation and regional education policy contributed to the unruly atmosphere in Valley School and the spatial negotiations and well-being of the children there. In addressing all of these sub-questions I aim to answer the first, main research question and produce an understanding of how space, gender and well-being are related in these children's school lives.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

As indicated earlier, this thesis is informed by post-structuralist and post-humanist theory on gender and subjectivities, as well as using Doreen Massey's theories on space and gender to formulate analysis of space within the school. Though using post-structuralist and post-human theories on gender, schooling and materiality, the theories do not form an overarching theoretical framework. They are instead drawn on selectively to illuminate specific points. For example, I deploy concepts such as Braidotti's nomadic subjects (Braidotti, 2002) and Barad's agential-realism (Barad, 2008) as and when these seem useful but make no claim to use a post-humanist theoretical apparatus systematically throughout. Though intrigued by the potential that post-human approaches to education, research, gender and subjectivities have, I did not design the research project as explicitly post-human and it would have been difficult and probably unconvincing to apply some of the more complex elements of post-humanist theory to the project post hoc. However, they certainly offer potential for future analysis and research on this topic, and their implications for this subject are explored further in the literature review.

Having said that, the thesis engages quite extensively with ideas concerning the fluidity of gender and subjectivities, theorisations of the child (informed by post-structuralist theory) and post-structuralist and post-humanist thoughts on space (Massey, 2005) and educational spaces (Taylor, 2013; Hillevi and Palmer, 2013). The primary contribution of these approaches here is the way that they attempt to dissolve and trouble existing binaries of gender, and theoretical binaries concerning discourse and materiality. With a focus on space (and specific hyper-local school spaces) this thesis is able to coherently explore the ways in which materiality and space inform, and are informed by, human subjectivities, social relations and gender relations.

1.5 Methodology and Research Design

This project uses ethnography and qualitative interviews as its main research methods. These methods are underpinned by a methodology informed by feminist ethnographic and qualitative research in schools, as well as research that focuses on masculinities in schools (Willis, 1977; Ward, 2013; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). In utilising this type of methodological framework, the thesis creates data that chimes with Geertz's understanding of ethnography as being 'an interpretive act of thick description' (Geertz, 1973 in James, 2001: 247). This allows for the researcher to generate data that is close to the lived experiences of research participants. This is particularly useful when conducting research with children, whose ability to self-report may be limited. Therefore, by engaging with the participants' worlds (in my case, by being in the classes and playground with the children, and following up with interviews) I was able to utilise the ethnographic method to better understand these children's daily school lives. This methodological perspective had a profound impact on my research; it allowed for, and influenced, the change in research focus from violence to space. This would not have happened without the data-led perspective that ethnography allows for, and without the organic experiences that occurred because of it. The nuances of the children's spatial negotiations within Valley School, as well as the ways in which these negotiations inform their gendered selves, were illuminated by ethnographic methods in a way that quantitative or survey methods would not have allowed for. Though this means that the data is not generalizable in the ways that statistical or survey-based projects would have been, it allows us to understand the lived experiences of children in a specific region and locality of Wales and the UK, and generates insights into the relationship of spatiality and schooling, as well as potential foundations for different perspectives on policy and practice in Wales and the UK.

1.6 Research Setting and Implementation

Valley School is a secondary school in South Wales in Valley Town (the names of both school and town have been changed for anonymity's sake and obvious details that may identify them have not been included). I had initially set up access to the secondary school where I conducted my Masters-level research; however, by the time I came to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral project, this school had been closed and merged with other local schools to become one of the so-called 'super schools' that are proliferating across Wales at the present time. I therefore had to work quickly to find a contact at another school with a similar socio-economic profile.

Valley School serves a number of local villages and towns in the region, as many schools in the South Wales valleys do. Though it scored a 'good' assessment in its last ESTYN inspection report, it has now been earmarked for closure. The school will close in 2018. Before I started the project, the school itself had been closed for over a year due to structural issues. This had caused student uptake to fall by quite an alarming rate, and meant that the children I conducted research

with had only begun attending the Valley School campus in their second year of school, as they had been relocated to a temporary campus during their first school year (Year Seven). The spatial implications of these macro-instabilities are explored further during the analysis chapters. This pattern of rural and semi-rural school closures has been heavily criticised in Wales (e.g. Hulme, 2016) because of the negative impact it has on students and local communities.

After speaking with a contact at the school, I was told that the deputy head had expressed an interest in the research project I proposed and I met with him in September 2014. However, research did not begin until January 2015 as I was on paternity leave during November and December 2014. Upon returning to Valley School, I set about finding a suitable class to conduct research. At first, I wanted to observe only one or two classes and get to know the children a little before starting to observe more lessons. I also sought to conduct walking tours with the children in small friendship groups around the school, so as to get to know the school from their perspective (the use of mobile methods is discussed further in Chapter Three). However, because of organisational and logistical difficulties within the school, I was only able to conduct one walking tour with four children. However, this walking tour alone provided rich information and helped to inform my change in research focus from violence to space.

Once individual and parental consent forms had been obtained, the research started in earnest and I observed a number of different classes on a regular basis in Valley School, whilst also spending time occasionally with the children walking between classes and at lunchtimes and break times. I would often use these periods to conduct group and individual interviews in unoccupied classrooms in the school. I did not begin conducting interviews until a month or so into the fieldwork; this was partly logistical and partly due to the research framework. I wanted to understand the children's worlds and what was important to them prior to speaking to them in semi-structured interviews.

1.7 Chapter Structure

Chapter Two: Exploring the Literature

The second chapter of the thesis explores the literature that underpins and informs this thesis. I begin by situating my thesis within the rich tradition of ethnographic and qualitative research in schools. I then delve further into this tradition by looking at key ethnographic works that explore gender and education. I draw on key feminist ethnographic works and authors, such as Delamont (1980) Walkerdine (1989) Renold (2005) and Lather (2001) and explore the ways in which feminist researchers have sought to research and understand gender formations within UK schools. I then move on to key ethnographic works on masculinities and schooling, and the ways in which masculinities have been informed and regulated by educational institutions and norms (Patrick,

1973, Willis, 1977, Mac an Ghaill, 1994). I discuss the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) and the ways in which discourses of masculinity open and foreclose certain kinds of subjectivities for young men.

The literature review then moves on to explore the ways in which post-human approaches to gender and education have built on these classic works, and the ways in which these approaches may inform understandings of space and materiality in this thesis and in the broader research field. Of particular interest here is Taylor's use of Karen Barad's 'diffractive' methodology (Barad, 2008), which allowed her to analyse the ways in which gender is informed by material-discursive assemblages of bodies, objects and space within a sixth form classroom (Taylor, 2013). I also discuss Renold and Ivanson's research project 'Young People and Place' which used post-human theories and methodological perspectives to conduct research with young people in South Wales on their experiences of space, place, gender and subjectivities. This research is particularly pertinent to this thesis as it takes place in the same region as Valley School.

The literature review also explores theoretical approaches to space, primarily using Massey's influential works on space and gender (1994: 2005). Her theorisation of space as dynamic and fluid, and her ideas on the ways in which gender and space are entangled and interrelated, provide key theoretical underpinnings to this research, particularly during Chapter Five where I explore the ways in which different school spaces have different gendered connotations for the children in Valley School.

The literature review also looks at research that specifically explores the relationship between spatiality and schooling, drawing on Jenks' (2005) observations on childhood and space, as well as elements of children's geographies (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Hopkins, 2010; Davidson and Milligan, 2004). Burke and Grosvenor's works on school space and architecture are also explored, and their assertion that, "children have the capacity to examine critically the normal and everyday spaces in which they learn and can articulate their future in previously unimagined ways" (Burke and Grosvenor, 2015: 13) provides a useful foundation point for my analysis of school space.

Chapter Three: ' Finding Space for Research: Methods and Methodology'

This chapter explores the research methods I used in this thesis, alongside the methodological frameworks that informed them. I explore the reasons that I chose to use these methods, along with a section on how the ethnographic method informed a change in the research focus from violence to space. I go on to explore the literature on using ethnographic and qualitative methods to conduct research with children, drawing on James' assertion that "ethnography expressly

facilitates the desire to engage with children's own views and enables their own views and ideas to be rendered accessible to adults as well as to other children" (James, 2001: 247). I discuss the different ways that ethnographic observations can be used to conduct research with children, and the challenges of attempting to participate in children's everyday school lives. I draw on research papers and projects such as Boyle's paper (1999) and her discussion of the use of 'least teacher' and 'least adult' roles in ethnographic research in the school, as well as Renold's (2005) use of ethnographic methods to understand children's gendered selves in the school environment.

This chapter also outlines the ethical framework for this project, the sampling decisions, further information about the research site and participants, how data was produced, and also delves into the ways in which conducting research in Valley School could be a challenging experience. I draw parallels in the methods chapter between my difficulties in finding spaces to conduct research and the children's *spatial negotiations* in the school. These parallels are further explored analytically in Chapter Six.

Chapter Four: 'Nomadic Negotiations of Space'

This chapter begins the data analysis section of the thesis and introduces key concepts used to analyse thematically the data generated in this research. I develop the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' to understand the ways in which the children's spatial movements and engagements within the school are characterised by instability and uncertainty. I use Tamboukou and Ball's research on black women in education and their use of Braidotti's concept of the 'nomadic subject' (Braidotti, 1994, in Tamboukou and Ball, 2006) to inform this concept.

The analysis chapters are constructed in such a way as guide the reader around the school spaces in much the same way that the children experience them: as distinct but overlapping spaces that inform different parts of their school days. The first analysis chapter introduces these ideas and the specific spaces in Valley School that are pertinent to this research. I provide further context for the analysis by discussing the institutional, local and regional contexts for Valley School, and then go on to discuss the various school spaces that the children inhabit during the school day. I primarily draw on the walking tour I conducted for this chapter, as it provides key information on the spaces the children occupy during breaks and lunch, and the challenges they face in negotiating these spaces. I discuss the ways in which the children are involved in a continual, reiterative process of attempting to claim spaces for themselves in the school, and discuss the ways in which outside and inside spaces are experienced differently by different children. I also introduce here the idea that Valley School as a specific and particular (though not necessarily unique) unruly atmosphere which permeates all levels of the school, from macro-level institutional pressures and disorganisations to the children's everyday micro-level spatial negotiations.

Chapter Five: 'Further Exploring School Spaces'

This chapter goes on to explore the children's negotiations of school spaces in more detail, and crucially brings gender into the analysis. I begin the chapter with an extended section on the ways in which the female participants experienced space; the division between those girls who wished to stay inside during breaks, usually congregating in the music room, and those girls who wished to be outside at break times. Ideas surrounding femininity and passivity that circulate around the notion of the 'passive schoolgirl' (Stanley, 1986) are explored and challenged by juxtaposition with the ways in which girls seek to limit or explore their embodied sense of freedom and movement. The outside spaces of the sports pitch and the playground are discussed, with reference to the ways in which boys occupy the sport pitches with more 'legitimacy' than girls, and the ways in which girls have to negotiate these spaces and the physical, unruly activities that take place there if they wish to be outside. In doing so, I consider how gender is a factor in how the girls are able or unable to claim space for themselves.

I then seek to explore the ways in which boys experience space, not only in the school but to some degree in the locality. Using the examples of the football and rugby pitches, I analyse the ways in which these spaces have a 'portable' character, in that they can be found not only in the school but in the locality surrounding it. Drawing on interview data and observations, I explore how the boys experience these characteristically male spaces at different times and in different institutional and local contexts, and analyse the ways in which masculinity and physical aggression are played out in the boys' experiences of these spaces. I also draw on the experiences of one male student who had moved to Valley Town (and Valley School) due to bullying and harassment in his previous locality and school, and analyse the ways in which spatial negotiations are ongoing and spill over from school into the surrounding locality using his specific stories.

The final section of this chapter explores further the concept of Valley School's unruly atmosphere and the way that it presents itself in the 'in-between' spaces of the corridors (Clark, 2010). This section looks at the overpowering intensity of the physical and sonic outbursts of energy during the time when the children move from class to class and analyses various children's experiences of these spaces at these temporal junctures. This adds further complexity to the picture being built of the many different spatial negotiations that the children are involved in on a daily basis.

Chapter Six: 'The Unruly Atmosphere and Classroom Space'

This final analysis chapter takes the reader into the final unexplored space of the school: the classroom. In this space I explore the existence of the unruly atmosphere in Valley School and the ways in which it permeates interactions within lessons. I explore the ways in which noise and

movement are key factors in the children's micro spatial negotiations within the class, and the ways in which different teachers attempt to quell or redirect these forces to effectively deliver learning and teaching. I explore the ways in which noise disrupts teaching, but also the ways that teaching staff use noise and volume to establish order in the class. Though many of the examples and extracts here are examples of noise and misbehaviour that could occur in any school, I tease out the ways in which these instances come together to help manifest the particular unruly atmosphere of Valley School.

I then go on to draw parallels between my own difficulties in conducting research in the school and the spatial experiences of the participants in this study. I analyse the ways in which institutional disorganisation can inform the children's well-being, their spatial negotiations and the aforementioned unruly atmosphere. I provide rich data extracts of occasions where teachers were absent and no covering teacher was provided, and show how these breakdowns in school order exacerbated the unruliness and chaotic behaviour of the children. I explore the ways these experiences made me feel as a researcher, and the ways in which it may have impacted the children, drawing parallels between the two and using my sense of empathy with the children's situation to enrich data analysis within the feminist research tradition.

Chapter Seven: 'Conclusions'

Chapter Seven summarises the thesis and directly answers the research questions. I spend the first part of this chapter addressing each individual research sub-question, in an attempt to answer the main research question - how do Year Eight (12-13 year old) children experience space in a South Wales secondary school, and to what extent do these spatial experiences inform their experiences of gender and well-being in school? I draw on the data and analysis presented in the preceding chapters to attempt to draw conclusions as to how spatial negotiations inform the children's experiences of gender and well-being in Valley School.

I then conclude this thesis by suggesting ways in which the conclusions drawn in this thesis could potentially inform educational practice and education policy in Wales, and suggest directions for future analysis and research, drawing particularly on the possibilities that post-human theories and approaches hold in researching spatiality and schooling.

Chapter Two: Exploring the Literature

2.1 Introduction

This project seeks to explore and map material-discursive formations of masculinity, femininity and space within a specific school, locality, age group and context. This local and regional context-dependent approach lends itself to current developments in gender theory, not just in post-structuralism and post-modernism but in the approach of new materialist (Grosz, 1994) and post-humanist theorists (Barad, 2008; Braidotti, 2002) which will be explored later in the literature review.

It is also important to consider the change in focus that occurred in this project once fieldwork began. When I designed the research, I intended to focus on male students' experiences of violence in the school, and the resulting interplay of masculinity and violence. I had therefore begun preparing a literature review and research design which, whilst still placing itself in the tradition of school-based ethnographic research, was focused primarily on explorations of violence and masculinity. However, the research focus changed in the early stages of the fieldwork, when I realised that spatial negotiations were far more central to the students' everyday lives than dealing with violence was. Although I discuss the idea that the school had a pervasive unruly atmosphere, I never witnessed any instances of outright violence in the school. However, from the first meetings with my research participants, their focus on spatial negotiations and the ways these played out at different times of the day seemed crucial to understanding their everyday lives in the school. I therefore began to focus on space as the primary conceptual lens for exploring schooling and gender in this project.

I also decided to open the research up to female students as well as male students. It seemed crucial with this change of research focus to understand how both genders experienced space within the school and what it meant for the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, upon changing the research focus, it was important to underpin this change with relevant literature. This literature review reflects this change in research focus, whilst acknowledging that the research took place in broadly the same disciplinary tradition as the one originally envisaged for the project: that of gender and schooling.

There is a wealth of academic literature going back to the 1950s and 60s that concerns itself with formations of gender in schools. Rather than providing the reader with a history lesson of this tradition, I will be exploring the ways in which gender and education have been researched over the past thirty years. This will provide the reader with an understanding of debates and issues surrounding gender and education and provide a lineage through which theoretical approaches to gender (post-structuralism and post-humanism) have informed empirical research

on gender and education. I aim to build on this research by using space as a lens with which to view the gendered experiences of children in a UK state school. This enables us to further understand the ways in which gender is actively ‘made’ in the context of school.

This then leads into a discussion of the other crucial element in this thesis – space. This thesis aims to contribute to a growing body of literature on space and schooling, particularly (but not exclusively) in the field of post-human and new-materialist research (Hillevi and Palmer, 2013; Taylor, 2013). The literature review will explore theoretical and empirical research on spatiality and schooling, underpinned by an understanding of Massey’s theorisations of space (Massey, 1994, 2005) and theorisations of childhood and space (Jenks, 2005). The thesis explores the ways in which children’s everyday lives in Valley School are made up of myriad micro-level spatial negotiations, and the ways in which these spatial negotiations intersect and interact with the developing gender identities of those children.

The research questions for this thesis firmly place it in the context of research on gender and education, with a specific focus on the ways that space informs and shapes the experiences of school children. The literature review begins with an exploration of the literature on gender and education and formations of gender within schools. From there, it will explore developments in post-human research on gender and education, particularly looking at the work of Taylor (2013) and the ways in which materiality and spatiality inform this research.

2.2 Ethnographic and Qualitative Research in Schools

There is a rich tradition of ethnographic and qualitative research in schools in Western sociology over the last half-century. This thesis concerns itself with research literature that is focused on the social elements (gender and well-being) of the school experience rather than looking at academic practices or pedagogy. The key work in this area has often surrounded the hidden and implicit cultural values of education in the UK and the West, and this part of the literature review looks at empirical research conducted in schools that is focused on these social and cultural elements of the educational experience, rather than being concerned with educational practice in and of itself.

Within this literature and research is a tendency towards a certain methodological approach when considering children’s social worlds and school experiences: qualitative methods and ethnography. By no means the only ways to conduct educational research, nevertheless they have provided the bedrock to many key studies, articles and books over the course of sociological research in schools. Indeed, Salisbury and Delamont suggest that, “the sociology of education is a sociological sub discipline where qualitative research is prominently placed” (Salisbury and Delamont, 1995: 1). The following section of the literature review concerns itself with key research literature that has used these methods in conducting research in schools. It is not a

methodological overview; rather, it is an exploration of the findings that educational researchers *using* these methods have found over the years of educational research, relevant to this project and its research questions and themes. This literature tends to “bear the hallmark of what is known as the ethnographic method of educational inquiry” (1995: 1) which aims to ‘bring to life and capture’ the internal workings of school cultures and classrooms.

2.3 Researching Gender in Schools: Ethnographic and Qualitative

Approaches

One of the foundations for educational research on gender and social worlds in schools is Sara Delamont’s ‘Sex Roles and the School’ (Delamont, 1980). This book set the stage for many feminist researchers as it provided an innovative focus on the informal and formal ways that values surrounding gender and sex were enforced and perpetuated by elements of the school experience. These included curriculum choices, teaching practices, and children’s social interactions with each other. She argued, upon publication of the book in 1980, that “school and other educational institutions...are enforcing a set of sex and gender roles which are more rigid than those current in the wider society” (1980: 5) and used qualitative research methods to conduct research with pupils across a variety of projects in different areas and schools. She maintained a critical feminist eye on scholastic practices and cultures, specifically regarding gender and sex roles, and presented a stirring account of gender inequalities in UK schooling at the time. She particularly highlighted the distinction between *sex* and *gender*, and the ways in which binary expectations of what male and female students *should* do were informed by a confusing cultural narrative of ‘natural’ biological tendencies, based on sexual differences between male and female. She argued that, “we should not talk of sex roles, for the roles people play in society are essentially related not to biology, but to social behaviour; that is, they should really be called gender roles” (1980: 7).

Delamont, amongst others, also identified the importance of peer group cultures to children’s social experiences in schools. This is particularly pertinent to this project as the ways in which children experience and negotiate school spaces (and gendered expectations of those spaces) are critically informed by their peer group and friendship group experiences. The type of ‘group’ that they wish to be with, and their claims to spaces where those groups congregate, play crucial parts in the ways in which the children in this research experience their day-to-day school lives, particularly with regard to space and gender. As Delamont noted in 1980, “peer groups, or cliques, are a major factor in adolescents’ school lives” (1980: 47). Delamont’s book highlighted the ways in which dominant discourses surrounding gender and sex permeate all aspects of the school environment, from the early years classroom set up, through to secondary school and adolescence, and in the ways in which teaching staff structures and hierarchies mirror and

exacerbate gender inequalities and sexist attitudes of the time. Further work on sexism in education was carried out during this period by Spender and Sarah (1980) and Marland (1983), whose edited collections of research articles on sexist practices and structures were highly influential within the field. This work, broadly speaking, falls under structuralist, second-wave feminist approaches to feminism and employs the key concepts of patriarchy and sexism to underpin its arguments and explorations. These structuralist works tend to see societal structures and institutions as primary factors in shaping people's gendered identities and experiences.

Further key research in this feminist tradition was carried out towards the end of the 1980s through into the 1990s that began to be informed by post-structuralist approaches to gender and sex. For example, Walkerdine's 'Counting Girls Out' (1989) looked at the ways in which curriculum design and implementation of mathematics programmes were informed by sexist and stereotypical views of female 'irrationality' and supposed biological impairments when it comes to logic and maths. Though this book *was* focused on pedagogical concerns and teaching practices, it viewed these practices through a critical feminist lens, and attempted to deconstruct harmful myths surrounding female theories of the gendered body and gendered mind. This kind of explicit sexism in teaching and curriculum may have softened since this era in UK education, however, there are still dominant gendered discourses at work in schools, and understanding the ways in which discursive and material formations of gender impact girls' spatial negotiations and day-to-day school experience is key to this research. Though Walkerdine's work specifically related to mathematics in this book, she argued that, "mathematics becomes a foil or filter for examining more general issues of gender and education" (1989: 5).

Walkerdine's book used post-structuralist approaches to educational feminist research to challenge "the construction of scientific ideas (or truths) about girls and boys, men and women, minds and Mathematics" (1989: 5). Through this research, femininity was seen as, "a site of struggle, where socialisation does not easily work and where abnormality is always breaking through" (1989: 204). This theorisation of femininity is particularly relevant to my work, and the ways in which different girls occupy different school spaces, why they occupy them, how it impacts their gendered subjectivities and how their femininity is consistently and iteratively negotiated, becoming, and changing. Walkerdine attempted to move away from structuralist accounts of patriarchal oppression of women, stating that, "we do not agree that either patriarchy or capitalism is a monolithic force which imposes socialisation on girls" (1989: 205). She suggests that a post-structuralist perspective on these issues would be to analyse "the processes through which the modern order, patriarchal and capitalist as it is, produces the positions for subjects to enter" (1989: 205). This particular theoretical perspective is one that I share through this thesis; I am interested in the processes that inform subjectivity, well-being and gender, and

am interested in the *literal* and subjective positions that human subjects take up in (and with) specific spaces. This is why an exploration of feminist approaches to educational research is key to this project, for it is within this tradition of gender research in schools that I am attempting to locate myself. By using the ethnographically grounded concept of space to view the experiences of the children in this study, I am able to draw on post-structuralist and post-human approaches to research that allow me to disentangle the micro-spatial practices of children in the school environment, and the ways in which these spatial practices are co-constitutive of students' subjective and discursive experiences of gender.

The theoretical and research developments in feminist research engendered by the advent of social constructionism and the concept of gender 'performativity' (Butler, 1993) also brought about a focus on embodiment and materiality in the lives of girls in education. Paechter (2010) discusses the embodied experiences of primary school girls explicitly in her 2010 paper, and the ways in which girls were positioned in this study as embodying the 'girly-girl' or 'tomboy' archetype. She notes that these identifications (which were used by the staff, pupils and researchers) were, "largely based on physical manifestations, which in some cases included how girls dressed, talked, fought, and played, although some other attributes were also included by some children" (2010: 222). The word 'tomboy' was used explicitly by the researchers from the outset, but they were careful not to impose a specific meaning on the word, rather allowing participants to interpret it as they saw fit. Paechter states that she sees, "tomboyhood as a way of being, performing, or understanding oneself as female that has significant elements that are stereotypically associated with masculinity" (2010: 223). Therefore it is a category of femininity that has a certain element of duality and fluidity, allowing girls to remain 'female' whilst appropriating certain types of embodied behaviour (dress and physicality *etcetera*) typically associated with femininity. The oppositional type (the 'girly-girl') became seen by the researcher as 'co-constructed oppositional identities' (2010: 225). The idea of co-construction is relevant to this thesis, as I discuss in the analysis chapters not only the ways in which the embodied experiences of the boys and girls in the school assist in co-constructing their gendered identities, but also the ways in which space and materiality are implicated in this co-construction of gender.

As approaches to gender in education developed, so too did the theoretical approaches to gender. Ideas surrounding participatory methods and giving voice to participants (for example, marginalised children) were embraced and then further critiqued in a similar way to the way that second wave feminist theories were critiqued by feminist post-structuralists. Lather notes the tensions involved in conducting post-structuralist feminist research, coming from the tension between the "political imperative of feminism" (Lather, 2001) and post-structuralist ideas on deconstructing monolithic structuralist narratives (such as patriarchy). This becomes even more

complex when using ethnographic methods to conduct research into gender, as, by its very nature, ethnography advocates “fidelity to the phenomena under study, not to any particular set of methodological principles, however strongly supported by philosophical arguments” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 7). Strong philosophical arguments, such as feminist politics or post-structuralist theories, have and can be used by ethnographers, but they must be tempered with an internal reflexivity and an understanding that not all research settings will fit comfortably (or at all) into complex philosophical and theoretical frameworks.

Lather, working in educational research from a post-structuralist perspective, advocated a move away from this ‘realist’ tradition in ethnography, critiquing accepted ideas on the researcher as the ‘one who knows’, and research traditions that she suggested, “fabricate inquiry as a triumphal community” (2000: 304). She suggests that to, “situate inquiry as a ruin/rune is to foreground the limits and necessary misfiring’s of a project, problematizing the researcher as “the one who knows” (2000: 305). This approach critiques standpoint/emancipatory feminist ethnography as having, “romantic aspirations about giving voice to the voiceless” (2000: 305) and argues that these claims are, “much troubled in the face of the manipulation, violation, and betrayal inherent in ethnographic representation” (2000: 305).

Lather was working from what could be described as the radical end of feminist post-structuralism, however her cautioning regarding ethnographic research has arguable importance across the field. In drawing on the rich history of feminist and gender educational research, it is important also to understand the limitations of such research and the limitations and dangers of this kind of inquiry. To develop the discipline further is to understand and utilise current theoretical and methodological approaches, whilst also ensuring that one does not become enthralled by these approaches. Primarily, this project is a data-led, ethnographic exploration; though infused and influenced by important theoretical and research literature, it is led by the experiences of the participants and the data that came out of their experiences. It does not hold to Lather’s rather radical position on ethnography, rather it attempts to be mindful of her critiques. On the one hand, I endeavour to remember that ethnography is always a representation of reality, and that ethnographic findings may exceed or contradict theory. On the other, I believe that the ethnographic method and its methodological underpinnings have done valuable work in illuminating the experiences of specific communities, demographics and subcultures, and aim to utilise this approach to contribute to this tradition. These ethnographic approaches to gender are further complicated by the new-materialist and post-humanist turn in educational research, and the methodological contradictions and tensions between ethnography and post-humanist research on gender are explored further in Chapter Three (section 3.12 specifically).

2.4 Qualitative and Ethnographic Research on Masculinities in the School

There is a wealth of qualitative and ethnographic research literature exploring formations of masculinities in schools. Classic ethnographic texts such as Patrick's *A Glasgow Gang Observed* (1973) Corrigan's *Schooling the Smash Street Kids* (1979), and Willis' *Learning to Labour* (1977) were early examples, exploring the ways in which class, locality, delinquency and school and societal structures informed the development of teenage masculinities.

Patrick, Corrigan, and Willis (amongst others) contributed to the theorisation of a 'subculture of violence' (Patrick, 1973) amongst teenage boys. Violence was normalised and those who did not conform to this norm were ousted ("the juvenile who fails to live up to the conflict gang's requirements is pushed outside the group" (1973: 194)). It would appear that in this particular ethnography, violence and masculinity were inextricably linked and that young men were certainly pressured to engage in acts of violence or otherwise face being ostracised or attacked themselves. It should be noted, however, that the ethnographic research reported on in this text took place in 1966; corporal punishment was still in use in schools, and working class boys were largely limited in opportunity to undertake industrial or manual work (in the docks or factories) or became part of a criminal underclass.

Although *A Glasgow Gang Observed* describes a particularly extreme and violent community of young men and is, in this sense, atypical, Willis also commented on the centrality of violence to the male peer group he studied. He noted the ways in which male peer group practices mimicked and co-constructed violent situations, "the physicality of all intersections, the mock pushing and fighting, the showing off in front of girls, the demonstrations of superiority and put-downs of the conformists, all borrow from the grammar of the real fight situation" (1973: 36). As stated above, the initial focus of this thesis was on violence and masculinity, however this was not what I encountered when I conducted research in Valley School. Though the school did have a very physical, unruly atmosphere I never witnessed instances of violence or fighting, nor was the kind of violent masculinity described by Willis and Patrick particularly evident. The unruliness and physicality I observed in the school ranged across both sexes, and was not specific to the male students. Willis, Patrick and Corrigan all firmly place particular kinds of teenage boys in opposition to the societal structures around them – the home, the school, the workplace – and their behaviours are seen as a reaction to these restricting institutional structures. Power-imbued binaries such as 'student versus school' were not obvious or evident to me when conducting my research, though the unruliness and physicality described by these classic ethnographies certainly still exists in some form or another in Valley School. However, the masculinities and femininities I saw were more fluid, spatially and contextually dependent, and consistently evolving. These differences are doubtless in part a reflection of real changes in formations of gender that have

occurred since Patrick and Willis were writing. However, it seems likely that the difference can also be accounted for by the theoretical framework in which they were working. This framework viewed gender in homogeneous and largely static terms (for example, Willis's boys were either 'ear 'oles' or 'lads' with little or no blurring of the boundaries between the two) and, as I have indicated, tended to explain masculinity and misbehaviour as primarily reactive to social structures. It was these ideas that began to be critiqued in the new writing on masculinities on schooling that emerged in the wake of feminist research on gender and schooling.

For example, in *The Making of Men*, Mac an Ghaill (1994) critiqued and developed the work of earlier ethnographers on formations of young masculinity. Much like Willis' research, the importance of physical strength and violence to the male-peer group was still seen as integral to formations of masculinity. However, Mac an Ghaill's analysis of masculinity and violence differed from the previous texts by complicating the contributing factors to this perspective on violence.

Drawing on feminist ethnographic work on formations of gender in the school (Skeggs, 1993; Walkerdine, 1989) Mac an Ghaill identified the importance of sexuality and power relations as contributing factors to the associations between heterosexual masculinity and violence. Indeed, he cites Skeggs critique of *Learning to Labour* (1993) as being reductive in its articulation of male violence, and sexism as borne purely out of anti-school or anti-authoritarian motivations. Instead, Skeggs argues that male violence and sexism can be seen as, "a legitimisation and articulation of power and domination" (Skeggs, 1993 in Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 55). In other words, male violence and physicality are linked inextricably to *gendered power relations*; not only the institutional power the school had over the 'macho lads' but the power that they themselves could wield, via physical intimidation and violence, over other males and females.

Mac an Ghaill's findings on violence and physicality in formations of teenage masculinities took into account these gendered power relations and the contributions of feminist ethnographers to these understandings. His findings consider gender formations and power relations to be of a more fluid variety than the previous ethnographic work. Though he creates categorical typologies for the masculinities he observed in Parnell School, he notes that these categories were not 'fixed, unitary categories' and that the groups he observed were, "more fluid and ill-defined than in much of the writing reported in the 1970's on spectacular working-class youth subcultures" (1994: 54). Understandings of masculinity and violence are bound up in these more fluid understandings of gender and power. Power moves through different groups in different ways. Where the school wielded institutional and disciplinary power over the 'macho lads' they in turn mobilised resistant power against the school, and oppressive power over the 'academic achievers' via their own displays of physicality and violence. In turn, the 'academic achievers' offered ways of subverting and resisting this power themselves, subverting

'heterosexist discourses' that operated within the school, and yet still expressed opinions which 'operated within conventional gender essentialist categories' (1994: 61).

As will be evident, Mac an Ghaill's research, like much of the work on masculinities in the past 30 years, was strongly influenced by Connell's theory of "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 1995). Connell describes the prerogative for developing this concept thusly:

To recognize diversity in masculinities is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations* between the different kinds of masculinity: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate, exploit, and so on. There is a gender politics within masculinity. (Connell, 1995: 37)

This theorisation of masculine peer group cultures provides a backdrop to the ways in which masculinity is viewed in this thesis, but my ethnographic fieldwork did not lead to a place where obvious forms of hierarchy, violence and domination were visible amongst the male students. The key point I take from Connell's theorisation of masculinity is the relational aspect: the relations not only between different kinds of masculinity, but also relations between femininity and females, and the spatial materiality of the school. Connell's assertion above that, "there is a gender politics within masculinity" remains powerful. In this thesis, the gender politics involved in the students peer group cultures is explored through their relationship with space and materiality.

Building on Mac an Ghaill's important work, further research was carried out on young masculinities by Frosh (2002), Redman, Epstein, Kehily and Mac an Ghaill (2002), and Mac an Ghaill and Haywood (2003). Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2003) discuss the ways which teenage boys in the UK have been symbolised over the years as a problematic group with a 'troublesome reputation' (2003: 84). They suggest that this focus comes from a variety of institutional sources (media, government, school and police) and that it points to the so-called 'crisis in masculinity' that was prevalent in discourses surrounding masculinities at the time of publication. Frosh *et al.* suggest that teenage boys are engaged in a complex 'parallel developmental 'crisis' (2003: 84) in which few clear models or images of an 'acceptable' masculinity were present. They also, however, critique the notion of a 'crisis of masculinity', noting that, "the evidence on which notions of a 'crisis' in masculinity has been constructed is not as robust as might be expected" (2003: 84). They note the ways that data around attainment, gender and the impact of feminism on education and supposed 'male underachievement' may have been used to scapegoat or simplify the complex and contradictory ways in which masculinities are and can be constructed in the secondary school environment. They also suggest that the ways in which teenage boys produce and enact masculinities in the school, "need to be

seen as gendered practices which are relational, contradictory and multiple” (Frosh *et al.*, 2003: 84-85). The scapegoating of feminist advances in the UK education system for boys’ underachievement has been noted also by Francis (2006), where she argues that such reductive binaries contribute to neo-liberal discourses on gender, educational attainment and ‘success’ (the latter defined in capitalist terms by wealth or poverty). She argues that these kinds of reductive discourses lead to a dual attack on boys and girls, with the underachievement of boys in education being positioned as, “the responsibility of individual boys, rather than of social structures” (2006: 194) such as the complex interplay between poverty, class, and race in the UK. The ‘moral panic’ of boys’ underachievement in schools raised concerns in feminist educational researchers that this focus on boys reasserted male privilege (in discursive and budgetary terms) and, “was masking the continuing problems faced by girls in schools” (2006: 188 – 9). Therefore, when discussing masculinities in this thesis, it is important to remain critical in the face of monolithic neo-liberal assumptions about boys and masculinities. These discourses, whilst critiqued and undermined by years of masculinities and feminist research into gender and schooling, can still provide a comfortable and presumptive basis for assumptions surrounding masculinities, and a critical eye will be used when discussing the boys and their entanglements of gender and space in Valley School.

A subsection of feminist research on masculinity and schooling is concerned specifically with experiences of space. Epstein *et al.* (2001) explored the gendered power relations in the playground, and they note the importance of spatial negotiations and contexts in gendered experiences of children. Conducting ethnographic research in a north London primary school, they suggested that, “the geography and spatial organisation of playgrounds speak gendered power relations” (2001: 158). They note that the dominance of football literally cuts off the space available to children who do not wish to engage in football or fighting in the playground, and serves to re-inscribe the activities of football and fighting as “the primary signifiers of masculinity” (2001: 159). This kind of research has resonance with my own work, as I note the ways in which certain school spaces signified different kinds of behaviour and the ways in which children’s gendered identities were implicated in which specific school spaces they preferred during break and lunch times. The power relations highlighted by these approaches to masculinity inform the spatial prism through which I view my own research. However, I did not witness overt displays of masculine, hegemonic power to the same extent as some of the research texts highlighted above. Consequently, hegemonic masculinity is not the defining concept that I thought it would be in the initial stages of the research.

Having briefly looking at historical approaches to educational research on gender, the next section turns to more current educational research conducted by post-human feminist

researchers and considers its implications for this thesis. Although work continues in the broadly post-structuralist tradition represented by Mac an Ghaill and the subsequent studies to which I have referred in this chapter, the next section turns to a significantly different approach that has begun to appear in research on gender and schooling: feminist accounts of the post-human.

2.5 Post-Human Approaches to Gender and Education

The starting point for post-human approaches to gender and schooling is to be found in what Taylor calls, “the importance of things and bodies as vital players through which gender gets done, power is worked and inequalities re-embedded within the space of the classroom” (2013: 689). As that suggests, a post-human approach is a way of disrupting the usual conventions of qualitative research by offering a ‘critical practice of interference’ (2013: 692) which re-theorises the ethnographer as a research instrument, and allows her to pay attention to ‘what we don’t normally see, to what is excluded’ (2013: 692). This approach has particular resonance for my own ethnographic classroom observations as I seek to find the places in which masculinity, femininity and violence ‘intra-act’ and may be entangled in the classroom. This new materialist approach allows links between the micro, everyday moment and macro societal structures (such as the school) to be explored (Coole and Frost, 2010). This maps on to my final research question, which explores the ways in which institutional disorganisation and regional education policy influence the children’s everyday *spatial negotiations* in Valley School.

Taylor uses this approach to pinpoint key moments and assemblages within the classroom. Her observations on objects included how the male teacher refers to his flipchart as ‘Sheila’, a name which may have associations with passive femininity, and the importance of supposedly everyday objects such as pens and chairs. Her focus on objects is on what they do and what they allow to happen. For instance, one girl is ridiculed by the teacher for having a pen with a fluffy top, being asked condescendingly, “is that a sociologist’s pen?” This again associates femininity with a frivolous or passive subject position (whilst also establishing the idea of the ‘sociologist’ as male and serious, in opposition to the feminine). In another example, Taylor observes how the charismatic male teacher’s chair serves to reinforce his authority and is positioned in such a way as to allow him to gaze upon the class whilst ensuring their gaze is always turned to him. Taylor suggests that it, “was a seat positioned for a material performative of gendered bodily power” (2013: 693). In this example, the positioning of the male teacher within the classroom space is an important factor and shows the ways in which negotiations of school space can have gendered contexts.

What Taylor discovered using the diffractive new materialist approach is that by focusing on objects such as pens, chairs and a flip-chart she was able to observe and attend to, “that which is so often unnoticed, unremarked, or passed over as mundane in the materiality of the

classroom” (2012: 701). These objects and the assemblages they created with bodies and space enabled a focus on micro-entanglements and everyday practices that constitute the gendered realities of the classroom space. In my attempt to pick out gendered spatial practices in my own fieldwork, this theoretical perspective proved useful in observing moments and entanglements that may otherwise go unnoticed.

Further research that utilises new materialist approaches has taken place in the Welsh Valleys. Renold and Ivinson, as part of their ongoing ‘Young People and Place’ project, sought to experiment with new materialist approaches in their qualitative and ethnographic research with young people in schools and the local area. In particular, they use Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of assemblages and ‘lines of flight’ to, “experiment with different ways of creating research encounters that could capture the multisensory and affective relations of space and place” (Renold and Ivinson, 2014: 364). Concentrating on the experiences of teenage girls in a former mining town in South Wales, they conducted a variety of fieldwork practices, including walking tours of the local area, interviews and photography to explore the historical legacy of girls and horses in this locality, and the idea of a ‘horse-girl assemblage’ as a way of exploring their participants’ feelings on bodily freedom, movement, ‘lines of flight’ and moments of affective power.

This theoretical perspective allowed them to discover feelings and instances of liberation in amongst the predominant discourses of risk, safety and violence that surrounded the girls talk of their experiences of the local area. Discussions and observations of the female participants’ intra-actions with horses allowed them to explore the girls’ feelings of desire: desire for movement, for freedom, for a kind of wild notion ‘becoming animal’ and ‘becoming girl’ that allowed the researchers to move beyond humanistic notions of desire as an oedipal ‘lack’. Instead, they were able to explore the girls desire as affirmative and productive, articulating it as, “a fleeting moment, a queer becoming, in a dynamic social–material–historical assemblage where ‘pivots of unpredictability, elements whose trajectories, connections and future relations remain unpredictable” (Grosz, 1994: 174. In Renold and Ivinson, 2014: 372).

This research project and its resulting publications (Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Renold and Ivinson, 2013, 2014) are particularly pertinent to my research, as they explore gender and sexuality using new materialist approaches in a similar South Wales locality and post-industrial context that my research took place in. Similarly, the special edition of *Gender and Education* dedicated to ‘Material Feminisms’ in 2013 showcased some of the other important research being done using new materialist and post-humanist perspectives (Taylor and Ivinson, 2013).

Hillevi and Palmer's paper in this issue used Barad's diffractive analysis as a methodological tool to analyse the ways in which female students performed and enacted ill health in relation to achievement in a Swedish secondary school. Reacting to media and scientific reports on stress levels for female students (which, broadly speaking, placed responsibility for these problems on the same students) the authors investigate the school space and the material-discursive production of knowledge surrounding stress/illness and well-being by using a post-human, Baradian 'agential realist' framework (Hillevi and Palmer, 2013).

They present their aim for their paper as follows:

From an agential realist (Barad 1999, 2007) stance, the aim of this paper is thus to explore how the material-discursive school environment, with all its various agents and the plurality and diverging character of practices (Stengers, 2007), can be understood to be collectively responsible for, co-constitutive of and collaboratively enacting the phenomenon of Swedish female students' ill-/well-being.

Hillevi and Palmer, 2013: 672

The authors undertake this exploration using Barad's diffractive methodology in order to tease out the material-discursive arrangements of the school and its discourses that may contribute to understandings of wellness/illness amongst the female students. A key part of this appreciation for the material-discursive phenomena of the school involves a focus on its spatial and architectural materiality. They note that their analysis, "shows how various other material agents, such as the school building and architecture, which we usually take to be the fixed material backdrop of human agency, are themselves strong co-constitutive agents of school related ill-or well- being" (Hillevi and Palmer, 2013: 672).

In the course of this paper, the authors draw on interviews with female students, as well as media reports and visual artefacts, to explore the ways in which the material elements of the school can play a strong part in students' feelings of ill- or well-being. They describe the story of Paulina, a student who reported suffering panic attacks and other psychological effects when approaching the school buildings, and was absent for extended periods of time due to these problems. They describe the school spaces and the school environment as being 'a powerful performative agent' that had a powerful impact on Paulina's 'failed sense of well-being'. These kinds of emotional and performative associations with school spaces provide useful departure points for my own analysis of students' spatial negotiations in Valley School.

Hillevi and Palmer also describe how many students who have low attendance or high truancy rates describe the architectural layout of the school as anxiety inducing. The 'postmodern

transparent glass constructions' of the school, though aiming to foster an atmosphere of light and openness, actually served to make students feel constantly watched, and that most children who were asked about the school spaces and architecture complained 'about the feeling of not being able to find spaces of integrity within the school building' (Hillevi and Palmer, 2013: 679).

This idea of students attempting to find 'spaces of integrity' provides another useful analytical point for this thesis, as during my analysis I show how the students are engaged in complex and iterative negotiations of space and are consistently attempting to find and claim spaces of their own, in an unstable and shifting institutional landscape. The new materialist and post-humanist approaches to school research allow for interesting ways in which to perceive and re-frame the materiality of school space and the ways in which these spaces 'intra-act' (Barad, 2008) with human subjectivities.

Lyttleton-Smith (2017) also uses Barad's agential-realist framework to explore space and gender in the school, this time in a preschool classroom. She explores the ways in which space and objects help to configure certain spaces as gendered *boy-spaces* or *girl-spaces*, yet how these spaces and their definitions and configurations are open to constant fluidity and change. No space is definitively male or female, and neither are the gendered subjectivities of the children entangled in those spaces. Drawing from Barad (2008) Lyttleton-Smith argues that, "gender is not matter or a discourse that interprets matter but is something that *comes to matter* through the iterative becomings of subjects and objects in space and time" (Lyttleton-Smith, 2017: 13). These 'iterative becomings' are something that I explore during my analysis chapters, as I seek to discover the different social and behavioural practices that exist in different spaces, and the ways in which specific school spaces can come to be subtly gendered due to the repetition and reiteration of these practices.

2.6 Theorisations of Space and Gender

This section will focus on theoretical approaches to space and gender, primarily focusing on Massey's work on space, place and gender. She suggests that, "the intersections and mutual influences of 'geography' and 'gender' are deep and multifarious" (Massey, 1994: 177), and that, "gender relations vary over space" (1994: 178). This idea of gender relations varying over space is key to this thesis as I look at the ways in which the children experience and perform gender in different school spaces, and the ways in which different spaces have different gendered connotations. During the research, it became evident that there was a tenuous but tangible divide amongst the female students as to whether to occupy outside spaces (such as the playground or sports pitches) or inside spaces (such as the music room or corridors) during break times. This divide, and the girls' comments in group interviews surrounding this, point to the ways in which

“spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood” (1994: 179).

In Massey’s work *For Space* (2005), she outlines three key propositions for conceptualising space that her key to her overarching work on space, and inform this thesis’ conceptualisation of space. Before addressing these propositions directly, however, it is important to foreground them within the context of the debates between place and space, their conceptual and theoretical meanings within human and cultural geographies. The binary between these two concepts can lead to problematic and reductive theoretical assumptions, and Massey outlines these problems in *For Space*.

She outlines the ways in which concepts of space and place as different and oppositional serve problematic processes such as neo-liberal globalisation. She suggests that space and historical time have been conflated into each other via the process of Western imperialism and colonialism, and argues that a refusal of this conflation of space and time may lead to new and multitudinous ways of conceptualising space: “What if we refuse to convene space into time? What if we open up the imagination of the single narrative to give space (literally) for a multiplicity of trajectories? What kinds of conceptualisation of time and space, and of their relation, might that give on to?” (Massey, 2005: 5).

This conflation of space and history is key to Massey’s outlining of the problematic division between space and place that occurs within geography and in wider cultural discourses. She outlines this conceptual problem below:

In the context of a world which is, indeed, increasingly interconnected the notion of place (usually evoked as ‘local place’) has come to have totemic resonance. Its symbolic value is endlessly mobilised in political argument. For some it is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as ‘the global’ spins its ever more powerful and alienating webs.

Massey, 2005: 5

Massey identifies within cultural and societal discourses a prevalence for place to be used as an ‘essentialising’ force, which is frequently used as a ‘politically conservative haven’ (2005: 6). She argues that within dominant discourses on place are underlying assumptions, “of place as closed, coherent, integrated as authentic, as ‘home’, a secure retreat; of space as somehow originally regionalised, as always-already divided up” (2005: 6). Within these quotes we can see the binary division between discourses on space and place explored further. She suggests that these dominant discourses have place as the local, authentic site of everyday practices, and space as

abstract, theoretical, regional and national, and that this division limits and flattens our understanding of the inherent spatiality of the world. These divisions are inherently political, argues Massey, and she attempts to question, refuse and trouble these binaries throughout her work. Her definitions and conceptualisations of space are the foundation for the way that space is defined within this thesis, and form the bedrock of my decision to use the term 'space' instead of the term 'place' within the thesis.

As stated earlier, it is key here to present and elaborate on Massey's three propositions on space. She argues first that we should "recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2005: 9). Here, Massey proposes that interrelations and interactions are what produce space. This could be evidenced in the drawing up (and changing) of national boundaries over time. These are not abstract decisions; they contain multitudinous and historical interactions and interrelations. Massey uses the example of the Spanish colonialists that "discovered" America to illustrate this point. To them, America was a vast open undiscovered space, and the people who lived there were simply there to be conquered and subjugated to fit into the European colonialist narrative. To the Aztecs and Emperor Montezuma, however, this abstract 'space' was a local, regional, everyday 'place' that they lived in. Massey argues that to some degree this division of space and place assists in problematic processes such as imperialism, colonialism, neoliberalism and globalisation. Her initial proposition, that space should be recognised as the "product of interrelations" (2005) troubles and questions this division, by implicating human and non-human interactions and interrelations in the constitution of space.

'Second, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of the contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space as co-constitutive.' (2005: 9)

This second proposition develops further on Massey's theorisation of space, and begins to reframe space conceptually. Here, Massey refers to space as inherently containing multiplicities, and this is used to trouble dominant Western patriarchal discourses on history and culture. This second proposition chimes with feminist literature of the time (Butler, 1990: Grosz, 1994: Braidotti, 2002) that also suggested a movement away from binary concepts of gender, from humanist paradigms of thought and from dominant patriarchal Western discourses. She states that "the story of the world cannot be told (nor its geography elaborated) as the story of 'the West' alone" (2005: 10).

“Third, that we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far,” (2005:9)

This third point again attempts to trouble dominant humanist narratives surrounding culture, identity, politics and space. If space is recognised as always under construction, as never finished, then the inevitability of pernicious political processes and systems (for example, the dominance of neo-liberalism, or the inevitability of free-market capitalism) is troubled. Suddenly, politics (and space) can be seen as open, as potential, as not already decided. Massey cites the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Laclau and Haver as key works already working within such a conceptual frameworks. She notes that “as Laclau in particular would most strongly argue, only if we conceive of the future as open can we seriously accept or engage in any genuine notion of politics,” (2005: 11).

Massey’s theories on space form part of her feminist approach to theories of geographies and space, and share some theoretical similarities with post-structuralist and post-humanist feminism. She advocates a “thoroughgoing theoretical anti-essentialism” (Massey, 1994: 178) in feminist geography, and identifies the ways that historically, women’s physical mobility and restriction to certain spaces (e.g. the private sphere, the home) and from other spaces (public, professional spaces) has been part of women’s subordination and oppression (1994). This further invites analysis of spaces from a gendered perspective. Her view of space is as a dynamic, iterative “configuration of social relations” (1994: 3) within which “the specifically spatial may be conceived of as an inherently dynamic simultaneity” (1994: 3). This is to move away from presiding humanistic and essentialist views of space, which theorise space as ‘bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity’ (1994: 5).

Place or space? A discussion of space as a core concept

A key component of using Massey’s theorisations and propositions on space is the fact that I have decided to use the term ‘space’ instead of ‘place’ throughout my thesis. Debates in human and cultural geographies on the differences between the two terms and what they might mean sociologically have been ongoing for years. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to Nigel Thrift’s definitions on the differences between place and space as a way of underpinning my decision to exclusively use the term space as a core concept throughout the thesis and analysis.

Thrift explicitly outlines the problematic ways in which the term space had come to be seen as a common-sense term with a specifically humanist legacy (in much the same ways that

Massey does). He notes that in previous eras, geographers have argued that space is a 'given' concept that needs no further analysis – "some geographers still persist in believing that it ought to be possible to explain space and other like concepts in such simple terms that you should be able to understand what is going on straight off," (Thrift, 2003: 96). However, Thrift, as with Massey, critiques and unpacks this assumption as leftover from a humanist legacy of privilege which may be engaged in "a desperate attempt to try to reduce the wonderful complexity and sheer richness of the world in ways which mimic the predictable worlds of those privileged few who have the ability to make things show up in the way they want them to," (2003: 96). In an attempt to unpack the concept of space, Thrift outlines 4 key ways in which space has been used by human geographers who are attempting to move away from this simplistic approach. Though he concedes that categorisations of this type may be seen as reductive in themselves, he notes that these 4 categories "all share a common ambition: that is to abandon the idea of any pre-existing space in which things are embedded for an idea of space as undergoing continual construction exactly through the agency of things encountering each other in more or less organized circulations," (2003: 96). Thrift here is pointing towards a move towards a *relational* view of space that sees space as more than just a mere container of the world. Rather, in this relational view, space is seen as co-productive or co-constitutive of human and non-human interactions.

Primarily, I will focus on the fourth concept that Thrift outlines, that is what he calls "fourth space: space place". In this section of the chapter, he notes that in the past, place has been seen as more 'real' than space (Thrift, 2003) which he allocates to "a stance born out of the intellectual certainties of humanism and the idea that certain spaces are somehow more 'human' than others; these are the places where bodies can more easily live out (or at least approximate) a particular Western idea of what human being should be being" (2003: 102). This chimes with Massey's critiques of spatial concepts and their humanist, colonialist, Western imperialist traditions and implications.

Nevertheless, were I working strictly as a human geographer or in a different era, this thesis would very likely have used the term 'place' instead of 'space' as its defining term and core concept. The ways in which place has been seen in the past in human geography has been as a way of describing 'everyday life' in specific, localised regions and places, which is very much what I am doing in this thesis. Indeed, Thrift notes this tradition by stating that "all of those working on place seem to agree that place consists of particular rhythms of being that confirm and naturalize the existence of certain spaces," (Thrift, 2003: 102-3). In some ways, that was what I was analysing in this thesis: how the children in Valley School experience the space/place of that institution, and how their daily lives were experienced in that institution.

However, where this thesis differs from the traditional use of the term ‘place’ is in its interest and focus on the co-constructive nature of the specific spaces in the school that different children inhabit. I was interested not just in the routine and the normal, but in the ways in which different children negotiate, disrupt, or are challenged by moving in and through different spaces within the school. Thrift suggests that the relational view of space advocated by him and other human geographers (e.g. Massey) gives access to the variations within ‘everyday life’ and ‘normal’ routines. He states that “when the minutiae of everyday interaction are closely looked at what we see is not just routines but also all kinds of creative improvisations which are not routine at all (though they may have the effect of allowing that routine to continue),” (2003: 103). This description very much ties in with how I use the concept of spatial negotiations (introduced in the analysis chapters) to show how the children improvise, create and co-constitute different spaces within the school. Thrift describes this view of space as “in everyday life, what is striking is how people are able to use events over which they often have very little control to open up little spaces in which they can assert themselves, however faintly. Using talk, gesture and, more general, bodily movement, they can open up pockets of interaction over which they can have control,” (2003: 103). This is almost exactly what I am attempting to do in this thesis – to show how the children in a specific class, of a specific age, attempt to negotiate and claim spaces in Valley School and how these negotiations impact and affect their experiences of gender and well-being.

Why, then, use the term ‘space’ and ‘spaces’ to describe the negotiations of the children’s movements throughout Valley School? Because, as Thrift notes, “new thinking about place space involves trying to understand the gaps in the rhythms of everyday life through which new performances are able to pass” (Thrift, 2003: 105). Space here is not the abstract container of humanist tradition. Rather, it is specific *spaces* of a particular *place* (Valley School) that I am interested in, and their relational and co-constitutive nature, entwined and entangled with the embodied experiences of the children who negotiate those spaces.

Concluding theorisations of space:

In line with Massey’s and Thrift’s perspectives on space and place, my thesis aims to move away from essentialist views of space. The dynamism of specific school spaces will be explored through ethnographic data extracts and reflected on in individual and group interviews with the students: the ways in which spaces change in character and atmosphere at certain times of the day, the ways in which spaces are always open to claim and re-claim by other groups, the ways in which the ‘character’ and tangible atmosphere of spaces is always open to change and instability, and the ways in which the whole space of the school seemed to be pervaded by a palpable *unruly atmosphere*. As noted earlier, this thematic construct comes from my own ethnographic reflexive

reflections on the importance of space in the school, and will be articulated further in the analysis chapters. The *unruly atmosphere* concept also draws on the language of affect and theorisations of sensory experience brought about by Massumi (2002) and more specifically Anderson (2009). In combination with this concept, Massey's theorisations of the interplay between space and gender, and her theorisations of space in general, will play an important part in underpinning this analysis and exploring these analytical themes.

The ways in which the children negotiate and experience space in the school, and the way these negotiations inform their social relations, is well articulated by Massey (quoting Flood and Lockwood) when she writes that "all observers (participants in social life) move relative to one another, each thinking of themselves at rest, and each therefore slicing the space-time continuum at different angles" (Flood and Lockwood, 1992 in Massey, 1994: 4). Massey advocates seeing space this way because she states that "it seems to me important to establish the inherent dynamism of the spatial, at least in the sense that the spatial is not simply opposed to the temporal as its absence, as a lack" (1994: 4). Space is not simply 'filled' in these conceptualisations. It is not an inert, static construct that is passively filled with human social relations. Rather, it is dynamic, and influential, and this view of space "directly relates spatiality to the social and to power" (1994: 4). In terms of this thesis, I will look at the ways in which power relations between students, teachers, the school institution and the regional power structures of policy makers all inform spatial experiences and negotiations. Therefore an understanding of space as directly relating to social life and power relations is essential, so as not to fall into the essentialist trap of fixing identities and subjects (and spaces) to absolute positions. Massey articulates this eloquently, by stating that "the spatial organisation of society, in other words, is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics" (1994: 4).

Massey goes on to articulate the ways in which her views on space and her theorisations of gender are entangled and inform each other. She points out the binary constructs in classical conceptions of both space and gender, stating the "radicalism of the dualistic distinction between space and time and the relationship of that not only generally to other dualistic formulations but also – and crucially – to the violent either/or distinction between polarized genders which is currently hegemonic in so much of western society" (Massey, 1994: 7). In reformulating views on space, a researcher can therefore attempt to avoid restricting themselves to pre-determined binary or humanist views on gender and human subjectivities, and this leaves more space to explore and emphasise the micro-spatial practices of specific groups of people (in my case, children in a specific institutional, local and regional setting). Massey directly states her argument in her introduction to *Space, Place and Gender*, stating that "the argument is that some currently

widespread and significant ways of conceptualising space and place are constructed in the same manner as, and both reflect and affect, the contemporarily dominant western modes of conceptualizing gender” (1994: 13). In using Massey’s theorisations of space and gender, I aim to avoid or temper these “dominant western modes” (1994) of conceptualising gender and human subjectivities in general.

2.7 Spatiality, Childhood and the School: Theoretical Understandings

“Space, then, for a child comes to fashion experience” (Jenks, 2005: 75)

The Jenks quote cited here highlights the crucial conceptual entanglements between childhood and space. Indeed, the links between childhood, space and place can be seen in the discipline of children’s geographies, where key works have illustrated the ways in which childhood and space/place are intimately linked (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Hopkins, 2010) and explored the ways in which space and place inform and shape children’s experiences. Jenks describes the childhood experience of space as one in which space is extremely regulated and disciplined. Children’s experiences of space are situated (in the West at least) in the “modern, complex division of labour” (Jenks, 2005, 76) where “the very processes of capitalist production are manifest in our experience of spatiality” (Jenks, 2005, 76). Institutions, and their structures, are informed by the dominant modes of capitalist production, and the spatial opportunities they allow and foreclose. Therefore, children can never simply innocently occupy inert space; whatever space they may be situated in at any one time is “loaded with intent” (Jenks, 2005, 76) and is part of the complex web of global and local forces and institutions that govern our lives. Jenks (2005) draws on Foucault and his understandings of power to make the argument that the spatiality of childhood is intimately tied up with power relations in modern society. Children in the modern West become part of a complex system of surveillance, monitoring, statistical analysis, registration, and education, and are bound by legal and moral power relations that inform their childhood experiences from birth. Jenks makes the argument that “children are certainly subject to a fierce regulation that is primarily spatial” (Jenks, 2005: 81) and writes eloquently on the ways in which children, over the course of the industrial revolution, urbanisation and the 20th century, were subject to forms of domestication and control and, spatially speaking, withdrew (along with women) into the private space of the home. The ‘street urchin’ of the 19th century is largely a lost phenomenon now, particularly in the prevailing ‘risk society’ of modern Western capitalism, where children are seen as at risk from a variety of dangers both in physical space (sexual predators, urban dangers, traffic, crime) and cyberspace. This means that embedded in children’s spatial experiences is an inherent power dynamic and trend towards protection and regulation. Not only are processes of socialisation occurring (most notably in education and the space of the

school) but children are under the purview of private and state 'protection', where they are seen to be vulnerable to 'risk', a risk often located within specific spatial contexts.

Whilst it is important to understand the political and cultural contexts of spatiality and childhood, it is also important not to reduce children's experiences to mere passive receptacles of these myriad power relations and influences. Holloway and Valentine point to the ways in which global and local understandings of place and space are "mutually constituting sets of practices" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767) where "global and local are not irreconcilably split but are intimately bound together" (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 767). What this means for childhood agency and spatiality is an understanding that the micro spatial practices of children are inextricably linked with macro local, regional and global influences and power relations, rather than children being mere passive objects imbibing the influences of overarching power structures.

These understandings of the importance of space and agency within human subjectivity have been largely influenced by Massey, whose conceptualisations of space have helped shape much of the work on childhood and spatiality. Massey suggests that "the implicit assumptions we make about space are important and that, maybe, it could be productive to think about space differently" (Massey, 2005: 1). She argues that conceptualisations of space in the conventional sense have thought of space as "something to be crossed and conquered" (Massey, 2005: 1), and critiques this conceptualisation of space as it reduces human interactions on or in this space to the status of mere "phenomena on the surface" (2005: 2). She suggests that this classical conceptualisation of space places a dominant, linear, historical narrative within space, which "obliterates the multiplicities, the contemporaneous heterogeneities of space. It reduces simultaneous coexistence to a place in the historical queue" (2005: 5). Massey offers up alternatives to these reductive conceptualisations of space. She suggests that space be recognised as "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (2005: 9). This is particularly relevant to my thesis, where I draw links between macro regional and institutional contexts and the children's micro, everyday spatial practices within specific spaces in the school. Massey also suggests that we "recognise space as always under construction....It is never finished, never closed" (2005: 9). The ever-changing nature of the specific spaces of the school is aptly summed up by these eloquent theorisations.

Indeed, Taylor uses Massey's conceptualisation of space as a "practised place" (Massey, 2005, 9 in Taylor, 2013, 689), describing this concept as one where space "is always open, contemporaneously plural, emergent and under construction" (Taylor, 2013: 689). In this way, the 'dynamism' of space is foregrounded conceptually, and Taylor goes on to combine Massey's

conceptualisation with post-human perspectives on the “intra-activity” (Barad, 2008)¹ of material objects, spaces and human agency. She uses these concepts as a way to explore ethnographic research on gendered classroom practices in a UK sixth form college. Certainly, for the purposes of this thesis, Massey’s conceptualisations of space (and their attended uses in childhood and educational research) will serve as a starting point for the theorisation of space within the school. The importance of supposedly mundane, everyday spaces such as the school corridors, classrooms, and playgrounds, and the practices that occur within them, will be illuminated by the use of such a conceptualisation, allowing as it does an appreciation of the dynamism of space and the entanglements that occur between material spaces and human (child) subjectivities. By using these conceptualisations of space and childhood, this thesis aims to reframe everyday spatial practices in the school environment and show the importance of spatial contexts and *spatial negotiations* to the children’s daily lived experiences.

The ways in which children’s encounters with school spaces have been explored and theorised within sociology are myriad. Hopkins (2010) suggests that “the places within and related to school are important aspects of everyday life for many young people” (Hopkins, 2010, 183). He argues that spaces and places within schools are not static, inert forms but are instead “relational and in the process of being made” (Hopkins, 2010, 183). This idea, of space as always being-made and as always entangled with human subjectivities, links back to Massey’s ‘dynamic’ conceptualisation of space, allowing as it does the conceptualisation of space as always-becoming and never-finished. This has particular relevance to this thesis, as I explore the ways in which different spaces within the school take on different contexts and characters for different children at different times of the day. The difference, say, in the corridors of the school when the children are moving *between* classes is one of the key themes of Chapter 5 of this thesis, as I explore the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school is suddenly and forcefully manifest in the eruption of noise and movement that accompanies the time when the children move between classes. At this time, this key ‘in-between’ space of the corridors suddenly changes character completely: from being a silent, uninhabited space it becomes full of human bodies, pushing and shoving and shouting and screaming and hiding as they move from class to class.

Indeed, I can refer here to Hurdley (2010) and her work on the materiality of corridors and their impact on spatial negotiations and relations in a Higher Education institution. Though

¹ Barad’s concept of ‘intra-activity’ forms a key part of her post-human, agential realist framework. This theorisation is not used explicitly in this thesis, however, I will provide a brief definition of this term from Barad. Her most explicit definition of this term states that “the neologism “intra-action” signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual “interaction”, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (Barad, 2008: 33). ‘Intra-activity’ therefore forms part of her radical theorisation of agency.

not a secondary school, where perhaps hierarchies of power are more pronounced and explicit, her concepts and theories are important when considering the spatiality of corridors and can be applied to my analysis section which focuses on the experiences of the children in the corridors of Valley School.

Hurdley's analysis of corridors overlaps with the theorisations of space that underpin this thesis – e.g. Massey's three propositions on space, and her sense of space as fluid, dynamic and political. Indeed, this approach to space and materiality runs parallel with Hurdley's desire to conduct research on corridors, as she states that corridors have been "too often invoked as iconic, intangible metaphors, the presence of corridors as cultural materials can be forgotten" (Hurdley, 2010: 45). In a similar way that Massey and Thrift argue that space is not an abstract container 'filled' with human activity and agency, Hurdley notes the "mobility turn" (2010: 45) in recent work on space and materiality. This turn advocates an interest in "attending to material, spatialised, contingent practices that slide away unseen and unheard beneath the buzzing repetition of metaphor, icon and cliché" (2010: 46).

Though Hurdley is critiquing the move towards 'open plan' spaces in Higher Education architecture (and Valley School had not been, nor ever will be, designed in this way) her observations on the importance of corridors in an educational institution dovetail with my interest in research into educational spaces, particularly as I have a section of my analysis devoted to the children's negotiations of space within the corridors in Valley School. Hurdley notes that "as one person sets out on a particular route in this compendium of connections, she also cues a series of possibilities through walking, contingent always upon whom she might encounter on (or in) her way (Law, 1994; Thrift, 2006)" (2010: 46). This 'series of possibilities' within corridors is the key point on which to settle in my use of her work in this thesis. For the children of Valley School, corridors and behaviours and practices that occurred in them were a particularly spectacular and unique way in which space, the materiality of space and the interactions of space and human subjects were evident during this research. In particular, in Valley School, negotiating a corridor for a Year Eight student very much depended on who was *in* his or her way during that movement. Hurdley's findings will be further elaborated on during section 5.4, which specifically looks at the ways in which the children experienced the corridors of Valley School at particular times of the day. For the purposes of this literature review, it is relevant to say that Hurdley's assertion that there are 'corridor cultures' within educational (and other) institutions is absolutely in-line and borne out with my own research approach to space, and my findings on space.

Another crucial element of the way school space is theorised in this thesis is the ways in which children are involved in a process of negotiating space and claiming space as their own, particularly during break times and lunch times. Though we tend to think of these times as

'relaxing' for children, they can often bring with them a whole host of decisions and negotiations as to which spaces to occupy, who else wants to occupy them and what they say about identity and gender for those who do occupy them. During these times, these spaces help to make up "young people's informal worlds, friendship groups and social experiences" (Hopkins, 2010: 184). Though this thesis will look at the ways in which children occupy space during lesson times and in the classrooms, it is not focused on pedagogical practices or educational attainment. It aims to foreground the children's social, physical and subjective experiences of the school through the prism of spatiality. As Hopkins notes "surprisingly little research has been conducted about the built environment and places of schools of the interaction between pupils in these spaces" (2010: 184). This thesis aims, in some small way, to address this gap in the literature by specifically emphasising the importance of spatial contexts to the children's lived experiences in the school, at a variety of different temporal junctures in the school: during official 'class' times, the time 'in-between' classes, and the 'informal' periods during break and lunch times.

The ways in which schools as institutions permit, foreclose and specify spatial contexts and regulate children's day-to-day lives is explored by Jenks (2005), who argues that "the central issue in relation to childhood space is, of course, one of control" (Jenks, 2005: 75). He points particularly to the ways in which schools, as the dominant formal institution in children's lives in the West, provide "stages and scripts" (Kovarik, 1994 in Jenks, 2005) for children in which "space and time are closely interwoven" (Jenks, 2005, 76). The "stages and scripts" by Kovarik can be seen in the formal ordering functions of curricula and timetables. Jenks suggests that "the curriculum is an essentially spatial concept as it is strategic in mapping out the whole in-school experience of the child through a combination of space, time, location, content, proximity, isolation, insulation, integration and hierarchy" (Jenks, 2005: 76). Curricula contain spatial and temporal dimensions; they designate not only lesson content, but imply stages of childhood/adolescent development, and inform academic and cultural expectations as hierarchies of learning, gender behaviours and the idea of the 'well-rounded' modern child.

Within curricula, we have the micro spatial dimensions of the timetable, which again Jenks suggests is spatial in its dimensions. This because the timetable it cuts and orders the children's days and tells them not only where to be and when to be there, but also how to behave in that space, how others (teachers and students) might behave, and what to expect in terms of activities in that space. The timetable provides boundaries both material and discursive, and Jenks suggests that "classes may then be regarded as spatial units of activity that are provided with degrees of insulation from one another" (Jenks, 2005: 78). The discursive elements of the curriculum and timetables inform the material and embodied realities and *spatial negotiations* of the students in schools, and vice versa. Jenks draws on Foucault's conceptualisations of space and

power relations, suggesting that “people and units of space become synonymous” (Jenks, 2005: 80). Foucault suggests that space is part of disciplinary relations of power and control, being as they are both real, material, bounded structures that contain within them the institutional and societal ‘ideal’, “because they (spaces) are projected over this arrangement of characterizations, assessments, hierarchies” (Foucault, 1977a: 148 in Jenks, 2005: 80). Schools and their formal organisation, both discursive and material, have at their core a concern with spatial contexts, and to some extent these contexts are part of the disciplinary methods and power relations between children and schools.

However, it is important to point out that whilst this thesis draws on and is informed by these important theorisations of school spaces and power, it is wary of being drawn into dichotomous and binary theorisations of power and resistance, rebellion and discipline, and adult/child binaries. I do not seek to theorise children’s behaviour only in relation to the school’s power, nor present certain behaviours as rebellious or ‘against’ the order of the school. Rather, I aim to accept that the school has inherent power relations and methods of ordering and disciplining the children, whilst also understanding that the children’s micro social and spatial practices are not always a direct reaction to these disciplinary procedures. Indeed, part of the data analysis chapters shows the ways in which children may feel uncomfortable or anxious during times when the school’s organisational order breaks down, be it during unexpected teacher absences, or in the case of Valley School, dealing with the temporary closure of the school. Therefore, though the above theorisations of school space, childhood and power are important in the foregrounding and understanding of space in this thesis, it must also be understood that I am aiming for a fluid, micro understanding of the children’s spatial practices and their negotiations of space.

These concepts surrounding space can be said to fit into two disciplinary and literary streams: educational research with a focus on space, and social geographies that take place in the school. Drawing from work on social geographies, the ways in which emotions and subjectivities are entwined with space and place are elucidated by Milligan and Davidson. They argue that emotions should be central to understandings of space and place, and describe this position as appreciating “the emotionally dynamic spatiality of contemporary social life” (Milligan and Davidson, 2004: 524). This thesis aims to draw on this conceptualisation of space, in tandem with Massey’s theories on the dynamism of space, in order to tease out the ways in which experiences of gender, space and well-being all intersect in Valley School.

This focus on the emotional and social elements of school space is taken up by McGregor (2004), who explores the ways in which school space, school materials and objects inform power relations within the school. She quotes McDowell and Sharp, who suggest that “social life

necessarily happens in certain spaces and places” (McDowell and Sharp, 1999 in McGregor, 2004: 351). She also notes the lack of research on the ways in which school spaces are experienced, stating that “the dearth of literature on the influence of the physical environment of English schools is striking” (McGregor, 2004: 354). In her paper, she goes on to explore the ways in which specific school spaces (such as the classroom) are involved in a reciprocal relationship with practices and actions. She quotes Jacklin, who states “the physical form of produced spaces, such as classrooms, materialise past time/space practices, social relations and pedagogic modes” (Jacklin, 2001 in McGregor, 2004, 355). This idea that specific spaces ‘materialise past time/space practices’ and ‘social relations’ is particularly pertinent to this thesis, as during analysis I show how certain practices are repeated in specific spaces at specific times during the school day.

There is also a body of work concerning the ways in which spatiality and power play out in the school environment. Gallagher (2011) discusses the ways in which sound informs the power dynamics between students and teachers in school spaces. He notes that sound combines with space to create material-experiential forms of power and surveillance, and draws on Foucauldian understandings of power to tease out these complex dynamics.

Similarly, Reh, Rabenstein and Fritzsche point out the ways in which power plays out amongst students and teachers in school spaces. They note that “positioning among students gives rise to differences that are enacted and represented spatially” (Reh, Rabenstein and Fritzsche: 2011, 84). This is particularly relevant to my exploration of spaces that students occupy during break and lunch times, and the ways in which their spatial positioning impacts on their gendered identities. They also draw out the ways in which school spaces impact on activities and behaviours, in a cyclical iterative relationship with social norms and subjectivities, “spaces themselves can have a pre-figurative effect on activities in their materiality and more so when they become charged in a meaningful way. Spaces themselves are in a sense knots in a network of power” (Reh *et al*, 2011, 85). This idea of school spaces being ‘charged in a material way’ is relevant to this thesis, as in the analysis chapters I explore the ways in which specific school spaces, such as the corridors, become ‘charged’ by the particular *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School, which seemed to play a part in the activities and behaviours that took place in said spaces.

Reh *et al* also note the ways in which the “materiality of spaces” (Reh *et al*, 2011) opens up or forecloses the potential for specific groups to make claims on those spaces. They note that the materiality of spaces “prefigures in different ways the possibilities of taking possession of spaces and staking a claim to them, of territorialising them and of marking a special type of individual territory by rejecting others claims” (Reh *et al*, 2011, 85). This chimes to my discussion of the ways in which children in Valley School attempt to stake claims for different spaces in the school, at break times and lunch times, and the ways in which these spaces are constantly open to

being colonised and re-territorialised by other groups of people. This feeds into the idea, put forward during analysis, that children are involved in almost constant negotiations of space, and the materiality of specific spaces informs these negotiations.

The ways in which the macro problems of the school (budget cuts, structural irregularities, and inspection pressures) informed the micro spatial practices of the children is an important part of this thesis. The ways in which these pressures informed not only the children's daily lives, but also my research experience, were intimately tied to these factors. Attempting to find appropriate spaces to conduct individual and group interviews was an ongoing problem during the research, as was the challenge of being placed in a position of *de facto* authority at times of unexplained teacher absence, which happened numerous times. During these occasions, the interplay of the macro institutional pressures and the micro spatial practices of the children (and the research) became apparent to me. It was also clear, to some degree, that the children were aware of the importance of space to their day-to-day lives, and the ways in which the limitations of the old school buildings and spaces within and between them could impact their lives. As Burke and Grosvenor suggest, "children have the capacity to examine critically the normal and everyday spaces in which they learn and can articulate their future in previously unimagined ways" (Burke and Grosvenor, 2015: 13). This 'critical capacity' that the children have surrounding space became very clear to me as I began my fieldwork in the school; so much so that I changed the focus of the research project, from looking at violence in the school (of which I saw very little) to focusing on the children's *spatial negotiations* (which seemed to inform every single part of their day). Indeed, as Burke and Grosvenor state, "for many children, school represents a difficult territory that they have to negotiate from the bus journey at the beginning of the day to the completion of homework at the end" (2015, 110). This idea of myriad *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in is explored in depth in the analysis chapters of this thesis, and is expanded into the concept of the children's 'nomadic negotiations of space' a conceptual innovation that runs through all three data analysis chapters. In some ways I am attempting to portray and re-frame the mundane, everyday lives of children in schools, and the difficulties and negotiations they face simply going through school spaces day-to-day. I situate this analysis specifically in Valley School, a failing school with specific academic, regional and political pressures and challenges. This is, to some extent, to inform debates surrounding childhood well-being in schools, and to remind adult policy makers and researchers of the intense vulnerability that children can feel when in school (2015). Burke and Grosvenor suggest that "there are many sources of stress which are directly to do with the physical environment and the material world of the school" (2015: 111). By foregrounding space conceptually and analytically in this thesis, I am also attempting to foreground the impact it can have on children's well-being and quality of life in school, particularly in a school under a variety of intense pressures.

2.8 Conclusions

This literature review has attempted to set out the empirical and theoretical literature that informs and underpins this project. As was explained, a key change in the research focus, based on ethnographically grounded fieldwork experiences of the phenomena observable in Valley School, ushered in a change in the theoretical and empirical literature underpinning the thesis. However, despite this change in focus, two key elements remained from the initial research design – gender and schooling. Consequently, the thesis can be viewed as a contribution to the rich tradition of school-based ethnographies that explore gender relations (Delamont, 1980; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Renold, 2005; Willis, 1977), maintaining their focus on gender as something that is, in part, actively made within the practices and processes of schooling and in the interactions and cultures of pupils but adding to this an emphasis on space and *spatial negotiations*. In this way the thesis attempts to add to knowledge by contributing to the burgeoning literature on space and schooling (Taylor, 2013; Lyttleton-Smith, 2017) and analysing the relations between *spatial negotiations* and gendered subjectivities in the lives of these children in Valley School.

As will by now be evident, that analysis of *spatial negotiations* and gendered subjectivities takes as central point of reference current developments in educational gender research, specifically, post-humanist feminist research and the reframing of materiality and agency and human subjectivity in light of this theoretical development. As the chapter has argued, research that draws on theorists such as Karen Barad (2008) Rosi Braidotti (2006), and Deleuze and Guattari (1988) provides a useful and innovative way for reframing the importance of materiality and spatial contexts in the lives of school children, and the development of their gendered subjectivities. The special issue of *Gender and Education* in 2013 that focuses on new materialism and post-humanism provides key works that support the movement of this thesis into focusing on *spatial negotiations* and gender (Taylor, 2013; Hillevi and Palmer, 2013) and illuminates the growing body of empirical research literature in this area. The ways in which gender and space are entangled, and the power of the school spaces, is explicated particularly well by Hillevi and Palmer (2013).

However, as will also be evident, the theoretical foundation for the thesis's focus on space is to be found in Massey's rethinking of space as something that is dynamic and evolving. This replaces the classical humanist conceptualisations of space, which Massey points out are often indebted to unquestioned patriarchal and imperialist theoretical norms. Her argument that "spaces and places are not only themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood" (Massey, 1994: 179) informs the way that space is conceptualised in this thesis. The above quote points to the ways in which space and gender can be co-constructed, and this concept of a relational entangled relationship

between space and gender will be used in the analysis chapters to explore the children's gendered relationships with specific school spaces. Massey's approach to space and gender provides theoretical underpinning for the exploration of space in this thesis; her work is also of a piece of with the post-structuralist and post-humanist empirical research on gender and schooling that directly informs this thesis. The thesis attempts to add to this body of work with a specific focus on space in the school.

Finally, the thesis's analysis of the relations between *spatial negotiations* and gendered subjectivities is informed by Jenks's work and the new sociology of childhood, not least Jenks's emphasis on social regulation and protection of the child (through schooling and other social institutions and norms) and the ways in which spatiality informs these regulatory systems and power dynamics. As Jenks suggests, "children are certainly subject to a fierce regulation that is primarily spatial" (Jenks, 2005: 81). This regulatory experience of childhood informs the thesis in the ways I look at the different manner in which children experience space during class, during breaks and in between classes. All of these temporal shifts imply regulatory shifts in the *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in, and understanding the ways in which their lives in school are regulated through space informs the core of this thesis.

If McGregor's observation that "the dearth of literature on the influence of the physical environment of English schools is striking" (McGregor, 2004: 354) is less true today than it was in 2004, it is possible to argue that the primary focus in educational research has continued to be on social and moral codes rather than an appreciation of how materiality informs identity and subjectivity. This thesis attempts to contribute to this literature on school space by focusing on the *spatial negotiations* that school children are involved in on an everyday basis. Re-inserting materiality (in the form of spatiality) into research on gender and schooling is, broadly speaking, how this thesis attempts to contribute to knowledge in an original way. These elements make up the core of this thesis and its conceptual lens, and in underpinning this thesis with the key literature outlined above, I hope to ensure that this thesis can contribute to the growing body of work on school spaces and gender. The next chapter outlines the research methods and methodology for this chapter.

Chapter 3. Finding Space for Research: Methods and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the methodological aspects of this thesis. It explores the reasons that I used ethnographic and qualitative methods to conduct research on the children's experiences of space, gender and well-being within the school. The chapter will show how this research was influenced by qualitative research with children, particularly from a feminist and gender research perspective, and how this work influenced my research design and data production. This thesis reports on a small scale, exploratory research endeavour, one which attempts to shine a light on the experiences of children in a region of South Wales with a lower socio-economic demographic, using ethnographic and qualitative methods. This approach allows for a greater depth and richness in the data collected. However, the obvious shortfall is in the small sample size of participants and the lack of generalizable data. The value in ethnographic research projects such as this is to provide a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973 in James, 2001: 247) which enables us to drill down into the particular social norms of specific local and regional cultures and to see a particular local cultural world from the point of view of the actors who inhabit and constitute that world. The ethnographic method, and the methodology underpinning it, allows the researcher to get closer to the fluidity of social experiences and grasp what is temporary and immediate, as well as what is pervasive and reiterated. The ethnographic approach in the case of this thesis also played a crucial role in changing the research focus from violence to space. Due to the adaptability of ethnography, and the way it allows the research site and participants experiences to lead the researcher, I was able to observe the centrality of *spatial negotiations* for the children in Valley School, and this led me to decide to change the focus of my thesis to reflect this.

Ethnographic, exploratory studies of this kind can also pave the way for broader, larger scale studies with increased sample sizes (though that is not their only use). It was not my intention here to prove a statistical or theoretical hypothesis. Rather, I sought draw to on the rich history of ethnographic research in schools in the UK, with particular attention being paid to feminist (and feminist influenced) and class based ethnographic, qualitative research. I also sought to draw on and develop my own experience of working on previous research projects, having taken part in three research studies with children in South Wales on topics surrounding gender and violence. There is a burgeoning and rich qualitative research culture surrounding children and young people in Wales (Renold and Ivinson: 2013, Ward: 2013, Lyttleton-Smith: 2017) and this thesis hopes to contribute in some small way to that emergent and developing research literature and culture.

3.2 Chapter Structure

The chapter looks not only at the methods and methodological approaches I took to research, but also the challenges involved in researching the *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School, and of researching in a school which was under severe academic and financial pressure at the time of fieldwork. An important part of this methods chapter also concerns the substantial shift in my research focus, which came about primarily because of my initial ethnographic experiences in the field. Section 3.3 details the initial research design, which focused primarily on the interplay between violence and gender, and shows the challenges I had in setting up a research site after losing my intended site due to school closure. This also helps to paint a picture of the regional policy setting, which in South Wales is volatile: small schools in semi-rural areas are frequently being closed and merged with other secondary schools to form so-called large 'super schools'. I also detail how I changed my research design to include girls and boys as participants, again reacting ethnographically to the research site and potential participants.

After this, I explain the reasons why I chose to conduct research using ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews. I explore the relevant literature on this topic, as well as discussing how these methods can be useful when conducting research with children in a school setting. I then go on to detail my ethical outlook when conducting this research, and give some background to the research site and the participants, in terms of school inspection reports, size and demographic of students.

I also detail my own research schedule, including negotiating access and how frequently I attended the school. This is so the reader can understand and get a feel for my research experience in the school and my research routine. I detail the data production techniques used, including fieldwork classroom observations, a walking tour, and semi-structured group interviews.

Following this, I have an extended section on the specific challenges I faced conducting research in this school and locality. Here I use the concept of space to detail these experiences, as I felt that my difficulties finding 'space' (literally and discursively) to conduct research in the school to some extent mirrored the experiences of the children and the frequent *spatial negotiations* they were involved in in the school. Throughout this chapter I draw the reader's attention to the difficulties and challenges I faced methodologically and how I attempted to overcome these challenges.

After this extended section, I outline the limitations of the methodological approach I have taken, delving into issues of reliability and validity of ethnographic and qualitative data. Ethnographic data is not 'reliable' in the traditional, statistical sense as it cannot be tested or generalised. Ethnographic research looks at the social world, which produces variable data and

shifts over time. It focuses on contingent social phenomena, and often the researcher is implicated in the data generation. This section deals with these methodological issues and makes clear the value that ethnographic data has to this thesis and its research questions. Finally I introduce the reader to the approaches I will be taking to data analysis in the next chapters, as well as explicating why these approaches are suitable to the kinds of data produced by using these methods.

3.3 Ethnography and Interviews: Developing the Research Methodology and Design

The research design for this thesis began during the research I conducted in support of my Masters dissertation in 2013. This dissertation, entitled 'Teenage Boys Understandings of Sexual Violence towards Girls and Women', used qualitative interviews to explore teenage boys' understandings of sexual violence in a secondary school in the South Wales valleys. One of the conclusions from this piece of research was the ways in which these boys conflated their understandings of gendered or sexual violence with understandings of violence in general: violence between boys, or violence witnessed in their town and locality. I concluded that to better understand this conflation of issues one would need to grasp these boys' experiences of violence, in their school and locality. I further concluded that the best way to do this would be to use ethnographic observations in order to see the day-to-day lives of these students. This became the germ for this research.

Looking back to my Masters dissertation provides a good reference point to detail some of the key challenges I had in developing this research design and negotiating a suitable research site. There were two key changes that had taken place since the initial research was undertaken back in 2013. One of those changes was to the research site, the other was to my sampling decisions surrounding the sex and gender of prospective participants.

When I finished my Masters research in the summer of 2013, I had already secured funding from the Open University for a doctoral scholarship. I intended to address the conclusions of my Masters research, namely that boys understandings of sexual violence were conflated with their understandings of violence in general. Similarly, I used ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews to research this subject, and I will explore my choice of methods a little later in this section. In any case, an established relationship with a school that suited my research design and had proved open and helpful in conducting research seemed like a real advantage when beginning the research design of this work.

The school where I conducted my Masters research also played a key role in designing the initial parameters for my research sample and participants, namely their gender. This school was

a boy's only school, and because, when I conducted my Masters research, I was seeking to explore pre-teen and teenage boys' understandings of sexual violence towards girls and women, it was a perfect fit for my research design. It also meant that when the idea for my doctoral thesis began to germinate, I was also thinking in terms of the project being focused on boys only. In both the research site and research design, this school was influencing the ideas for my doctoral research.

However, I encountered one of the first and biggest challenges during my doctoral work when in late 2013, only a few months into the programme and designing my new research project, I discovered that the school where I had conducted my Masters research was being closed, and was merging with a number of other schools in the area into a so-called 'super school' (a process which Valley School is sadly also due to undergo). This meant that I lost my research site and also my research contacts; the headmaster who had been so helpful in allowing my access and setting up the research, was retiring from practice after the merger.

Suddenly, I had no research site, and no research participants. I had to very quickly attempt to find a new school of a similar socio-economic demographic that would be willing to participate in the research. Months of cold calling school receptionists, emailing schools, and reaching out to any and all contacts I had in the education sector finally landed me a meeting with the Deputy Head of Valley School. After months of rejections and dismissals by other schools, this was something of a relief, especially given that coming into the doctoral programme I had believed that I had already secured a research site ahead of time.

The other consideration here was the fact that the new research site, Valley School, was a mixed gender school, not a boy's only school. The research design up until that point had still been focused solely on conducting research on violence and gender with boys, and I imagined that when I got to Valley School I would still only be conducting research with boys, despite the co-ed nature of the school. It is interesting how the practicalities of research sites can influence the research design; though I had always focused on masculinity in my postgraduate research, now I was going to research in a co-ed school I was still thinking only in terms of boys, as that had always been my focus.

However, when I began fieldwork at Valley School, I quickly realised that girls could provide a rich seam of data as well as boys, and this, in conjunction with my change in research focus, informed my decision to include girls as part of the research.

These are just two of the practical challenges I faced during the research design process, and this gives an account of the germination of the idea for the project through to the inception of the research. At this point, I would like to explain in further detail why I decided to change the research focus, and how my methodological approach assisted in this decision.

3.4 Moving from Violence to Space: Changing the Research Focus

As noted above, this kind of ethnographic research rarely sticks to the original intended research plan. Practical, methodological and theoretical challenges are frequently part of the ethnographic research experience, and the researcher must be adept at adapting to, and assimilating, those challenges and changes. This is no more evident than in my decision to change the research focus of this thesis from violence to space. As detailed above, I had thorough, empirically based reasons for designing a research proposal that focused on boys experiences of violence and masculinity in this region. I had conducted previous postgraduate research that led me to this research proposal. However, upon entering the research site and conducting initial ethnographic fieldwork, I realised that violence and fighting were not frequent occurrences for the children (at least not in Year Eight, the age group I was researching). From initial discussions and informal chats, as well as the walking tour I conducted, I realised that *spatial negotiations* were far more key to the children's daily lives and well-being. As time went on during the fieldwork, I came to be more and more aware of the complexity of *spatial negotiations* that the children embarked on daily.

Throughout the fieldwork I tried to balance my initial research focus on violence with this burgeoning data on space. As time passed I realised I did not have enough data to focus on violence as a key theme of this research. Whilst initially this left me uncertain and anxious as to the focus of the project, as I reflected on the data being produced I realised that space was key to the children's everyday lives. Because I was using ethnographic methods, and I had left myself open to the reality of the research site, I allowed the data to lead me, rather than attempting to force my intended research focus into the data corpus. This is a key part of the advantages of using an ethnographic methodology: it leaves the researcher open to new threads and inspirations, and to some extent allows the research site and the lives of the participants to come to the fore more freely than perhaps other, more formal and structured research methods would.

As time passed, I allowed myself to pay more attention to the spaces of the school, and when I began conducting interviews with the children, I asked them about the spaces they occupied during break and lunch times. This was fertile ground for conversation; very often the children volunteered this type of information prior to me even asking about it. Their daily geographical trails, their 'nomadic negotiations of space' (see Chapter Four), seemed to play an important part in their daily lives, the way they experienced gender, well-being and quality of life within the school. They were a source of worry and a source of sanctuary. They were also constantly changing and subject to the whims of other groups more powerful than the children to whom I was talking (be it older children, teachers, or even policy makers). *Spatial negotiations* were key to the students' feelings of well-being in the school.

Without the flexibility of the ethnographic methodology and mind-set, I may not have been able to see the centrality of space to the children's lives, and may have spent this time attempting to insert initial research concepts that did not fit the fieldwork setting or data.

3.5 Using Ethnographic and Qualitative Methods to do Research with Children

Ethnography expressly facilitates the desire to engage with children's own views and enables their own views and ideas to be rendered accessible to adults as well as to other children (James, 2001: 247)

The above quote illustrates one of the key reasons that I decided to use ethnography as my primary research method in this thesis. Having decided to focus on children's experiences of violence and gender, I knew that I needed a research method that would allow for such sensitive topics to come to light. There is a rich history of ethnography being used to conduct research with children, particularly on sensitive topics surrounding gender, sexuality, bullying, and other social problems, (as detailed in the literature review) and it was my intention to contribute further to that tradition whilst also using the most appropriate and ethically sound research method suitable for my research topics. Though in the end I redesigned my research to focus on space rather than violence, the use of ethnography and qualitative methods not only helped to research these delicate, everyday negotiations, but also helped inspire and inform the change in research focus.

There are various ways of defining ethnography and there is a long history of using ethnography as a research method, dating back to the anthropologists of the early 20th century. It is not my intention here to provide a history of ethnography as a research method, rather to focus on its specific use in conducting research with children, particularly since the 'new paradigm' in childhood studies came about in the late 1990s, ushered in by James, Jenks and Prout's pioneering work *Theorizing Childhood* (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Indeed, I will be using the same definition of ethnography that James turned to in 2001, that is Geertz's definition of ethnography as "being an interpretive act of thick description" (Geertz, 1973 in James, 2001: 247). Deriving from this eloquent definition, James goes on to say that the 'doing' of ethnography "might encompass a range of different qualitative research techniques, from unstructured interviews through to casual conversations, from the simple observation of the comings and goings of people in their everyday lives to full participation alongside them in different kinds of work" (James, 2001: 247). In many ways this extended quote sums up the range of research

techniques that I used to conduct research in Valley School, and highlights the ways in which ethnography as a research method is often a fluid and tenuous balance between diving in head first and taking careful steps back. Ethnography, in particular when researching with children, allows for the researcher to see the everyday lives of children, particularly in the school environment. When conducting ethnography the researcher must be open to the possibility that when entering the research site for the first time, the reality of the problems facing their participants may be different than those theorised in the research proposal and design, as occurred when I entered Valley School.

Prior to entering Valley School, I had theorised violence as a potential problem mainly occurring between boys. I had been ready to encounter male peer groups that used violence, either physically or symbolically, as a way to communicate masculinity and affect hegemonic masculine stances and identities (Connell, 1995). Two key observations, aided by my use of ethnographic methods, changed my research focus. One, which I alluded to earlier, was the presence of girls and their potential for contributing to the research. The girls' interest in the research project, coupled with my realisation that the research focus was changing, led me to consider how the girls in this class could inform this research study and have as much to contribute as they boys. Once I realised this, it meant a broadening out of the research sample and the research design, to encompass girls' understandings of gender, space and well-being in the school. The other observation was that violence was not occurring in the ways that I presumed it would – in playground fights or in male peer group hierarchies. What I found was instances of every-day 'rough and tumble' blurring into physical aggression, none of which fitted comfortably into a definition of 'violence'. Instances of physical aggression that occurred in the school seemed to be part of an overriding *unruly atmosphere*, one that I became aware of in my first few weeks of classroom observations and being present in the school. These instances, rather than being fights or malicious violent behaviour in the traditional sense, were epitomised by pushing and shoving in the corridors between classes, running and shouting and noise and crowding, and I began to formulate an understanding of the school as being a particularly unruly and chaotic place. Violence, to the extent that it was present, was occurring *within that atmosphere*, with instances of actual fighting or physical intimidation being rare or anecdotal. Thus, after observing this atmosphere of unruliness, I felt compelled to change my research design, so that it reflected these 'every-day' instances of aggression that were occurring within this pervasive atmosphere, and were central to *spatial negotiations* that the children were experiencing.

There is a rich history of ethnographic and qualitative methods being used to conduct research with children in schools (for example, Lacey, 1970: Renold, 2005: Thorne, 1993: Willis,

1977). The appeal of these methods for educational and childhood researchers is that they allow the researcher to, in some sense, “step into’ the children’s worlds. This mode of research suggests ‘an insider-outsider’ approach’ (Warren, 2000: 129), where the researcher can attempt to become affiliated with children’s world (a de facto insider) in order to “detail the specific happenings of particular locations and draw upon intuitive knowledges borne of the daily interactions of classroom life” (Warren, 2000: 129). The researcher, having drawn upon this knowledge, can then become the outsider again. In this mode, “the researcher can step back and locate these phenomena within wider systems of meaning” (Warren, 2000: 129).

However, these methods are not unproblematic, and they take a certain amount of reflexivity on the part of the researcher to be successful. The educational researcher must also accept that there is a limit to how much one can truly become ‘participant’ in children’s worlds. No matter how much the adult researcher attempts to become an ‘insider’ into children’s cultures, they are always ‘other’ by virtue of their adult status. As Boyle points out, “with children, the mere fact that the researcher is an adult immediately places them in a position of authority and power” (Boyle, 1999: 94). This certainly happened during my time in Valley School, and was compounded by the disorganised and chaotic ‘unruly’ atmosphere in the school. On numerous occasions I became a de-facto authority figure when teachers were absent and cover was not provided. Indeed, this happened on one of my first meetings with the children (detailed in the analysis chapters) and undercut the progress I was trying to make in building rapport and trust with the children.

Researchers have identified different ways to deal with the problems inherent in ethnographic participant observation with children. Boyle cites Fine and Glassner (1979) who suggest that the adult researcher accept their adult status but attempt to temper it by becoming a “friend with the children” (Fine and Glassner, 1979 in Boyle, 1999: 94). However, the problem with this kind of research role is that it can cause dilemmas for the childhood researcher; should the children engage in deviant or disruptive behaviour, the idea that one is a ‘friend’ with the children will be tested and possibly place the researcher in an ethically dubious position.

Boyle suggests other approaches to conducting qualitative research with children. She discusses taking on two different roles whilst conducting research with children: the role of ‘least teacher’, and the role of ‘least adult’. The least teacher role is explained as playing down the inherent authority contained within being an adult. Boyle suggests dressing casually, referring children to teachers should they ask about academic matters, minor disagreements or other institutional concerns. To some degree I made sure that the children knew I was not a teacher nor an authority figure. I informed them on many occasions that I was not assessing them or testing them, that the research was not being used in any way to contribute to learning or attainment in

the school, and that they did not have to participate in the research if they did not want to. It took some time for them to understand that I was simply interested in *them*: in their social worlds, in their everyday lives and practices.

Boyle also discusses taking on the role of 'least adult' (Boyle, 1999). This role is inspired in part by Mandell, who states that "the least adult role demands entry into children's perspectives, and thus necessitates negotiating an acceptable participant-observer role with children" (Mandell, 1988: 441 in Boyle, 1999). It means that, despite having access to the school and by proxy, the children, the researcher does not immediately have a rapport with the children. The key to adopting the least adult role is to be open with the children about the research, about the children's importance to the research, and how as a researcher you occupy a different role than teaching staff or other adults in their lives. As Boyle suggests, "taking an interest in what children have to say reverses the traditional role of the teacher or adult as the main holder of knowledge" (Boyle, 1999: 98). Though it took time for the children to understand that I was interested in them as people (not just as students) once they realised this fact I was able to occupy these least adult/least teacher roles fairly successfully. It was also the case that once a few children had taken part in the research (and obviously discussed it with friends) a flood of consent forms and research participation requests came in. As a childhood researcher, the power of word-of-mouth when it comes to building rapport with children is not to be underestimated. Once I had gained the trust of a few of the children in the class, the whole class accepted me almost immediately and rapport with the children, individually and collectively, became far more natural.

My interest and background in gender theory and research also assisted in attempting to conduct participant observations and research with children. Part of the paradigm shift in the 'new sociology of childhood' in the early 2000s was an attempt to move away from research which positioned children as "units of observation" (Renold, 2005) and instead attempt to approach research from "the standpoint of the child" (2005: 12). Renold draws parallels between the use of participant observations in childhood research and feminist-standpoint epistemologies, citing Leena Alanan's work as an attempt to commit to "foregrounding children's own experiences" (2005, 12) which would enable them to 'wield some control over the direction of the research' (2005, 12). It occurs to me that by adopting and understanding this view of childhood research prior to conducting fieldwork at Valley School, I was open to the children's experiences leading and changing the focus of the research. As an ethnographer, I was able to observe that *spatial negotiations* were far more important to the children's everyday experiences than fighting or violence. In this way I was able to negotiate and adapt to the "inevitable Pandora's Box indicative of qualitative research" (2005: 9) and foreground the children's experiences by making them the central theme of the research.

The decision to use semi-structured qualitative interviews alongside my ethnographic classroom observations came about as I got to grips with the issues facing the children at the school. I used different kinds of qualitative interviews with the children: the bulk of the interviews were semi-structured group interviews, conducted often at lunch times, with small friendship groups of twos or threes. I also conducted a 'walking tour' interview, where I asked a small group of children to lead me around the school, audio recording our conversations as we went, so that I could get a sense of the spaces that the children inhabited and what those spaces meant to them. I was also able to bring up some of the issues that I had observed in classes and between classes, particularly the issue of space and how important it seemed to be in the children's day-to-day lives in the school. During these interviews I was able to focus in on some of these pertinent issues that I had observed. They also offered a different research space away from the unruly and chaotic atmosphere that characterised the school. Indeed, James highlights this as one of the advantages of using qualitative interviews to research with children, "the virtue of using semi-structured interviews with children, conducted in a quiet space either with children alone or in friendship groups, is that they can facilitate a more focused and private discussion than would be possible in the hustle and bustle of the everyday public life of the classroom or school yard and thereby help ensure children's informed participation" (James, 2001: 254). This was certainly the case when using semi-structured interviews in this research, as the children were able to open up about their experiences of space and the atmosphere of unruliness that occurred within the school. This then allowed me to augment my ethnographic observations and field notes with data that focused in on the pertinent issues gleaned from those observations, particularly the importance of space to their everyday experiences of aggression and gender.

I attempted to use loose friendship groups when arranging the interviews. As noted by Renold, "conducting interviews with friendship groups often helps to create a non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere" (Renold, 2005, 13). I did not exclusively work with friendship groups, and invited the children to tell me who they would like to attend interviews with. Two individual interviews were conducted, however, on both occasions I had built rapport with the children and they stated they felt comfortable coming on their own. It may have also been the case with these children (Becky and Jonathan) that they did not have an established friendship group, at least not in this class, and that by allowing them to attend individually they were more comfortable than being crowbarred into another groups' interview.

3.6 Ethics

Ethical approval for this research project was granted by the Open University ethics board prior to fieldwork taking place. The ethical approval application was a particularly rigorous one, given my initial focus on violence. In investigating such a sensitive and volatile subject as violence, with a

vulnerable group like children, the ethical framework for this project had to be particularly robust. Despite the change of research focus, this process was useful for me in maintaining and understanding a rigorous ethical approach to conducting research with the children at Valley School.

Once ethical approval had been obtained, it was a case of ensuring that parental and individual consent had been granted to children who wished to take part in the research. In the end, I was able to obtain the appropriate consent for all the children in the class. I took a retro-fitted approach to research and consent: I took research notes from the off, concerning all children in the class, but was prepared to omit all data gathered with children who did not provide parental and individual consent for the research. I also did not conduct any interviews with children prior to obtaining parental and individual consent. Consent forms were given out on many occasions, along with information pamphlets for the children and parents to read about the research. My contact details, along with those of my supervisors, were provided, and the children and parents were made aware that they children could remove themselves from the research at any time and for any reason.

I also ensured that the children did not feel 'forced' to take part in the research. Though this meant initial inroads into building interest in the research were slow, it paid off later when building rapport with the children and when increasing participation in the research. I was at pains to tell the children that there would be no repercussions should they not take part in the research, nor if they decided to leave the research. I also told the children that all the information they gave me would be confidential, that their names would be changed along with the name of the school and the exact location of the school. In accordance with the schools child protection procedures, and good research practice, I informed the children that if they should divulge any information that meant that they or someone else was in immediate danger of harm, then I would have to tell the school safety officer or another available member of staff. This was the only information that could not remain confidential. I familiarised myself with the school safety officer (Mrs Hollis) from the outset of the research, and ensured I was familiar with the schools' child protection procedures.

Beyond these essential formal and procedural ethical guidelines that I followed, I also attempted to conduct research in a manner that was comfortable for the children. In choosing ethnographic and qualitative methods as my methods, I was aware of the ethical dilemmas that can occur when conducting research with young people and children. Paramount in my mind was ensuring that all children (participants or not) felt comfortable in my presence, understood why I was in the school, what I was doing and what their rights were in relation to the research. I also wanted to ensure that those who chose to take part directly in the research were provided with a

comfortable scene and setting for the research, which is why I attempted to build rapport with the children prior to conducting interviews, and why I attempted to interview children in small friendship groups so they would feel more at ease. Though the disorganised nature of the school (and the *unruly atmosphere*) sometimes hindered me in creating the ideal research environments and spaces, nevertheless I was able to use qualitative and ethnographic methods in a sensitive and transparent way to ensure participants felt comfortable talking to me.

3.7 Sampling: The Research Site and Participants

My intention with this research was to continue to conduct research in a school in the South Wales valleys. Although my initial intended research site was closed down, I was able to secure access to a school in this area. I wanted to continue conducting research in this area as I felt that the particular local and regional character of the area, together with the social problems and challenges that occur in it, made a study of violence and gender particularly pertinent. Sampling, in relation to both the research site and research participants, was a consideration during research design and fieldwork. However, I had to temper sampling considerations with the availability of research sites, negotiations of access, and the small scale, ethnographic nature of the project.

As Gray, Williamson, Karp and Dalphin note, “one might suppose that sampling procedures are unnecessary in qualitative research or fieldwork” (Gray *et al.*, 2007: 116). Participant observation and ethnography rarely seek “systematic information from a large number of people” (Gray *et al.*, 2007: 116). In the case of this research project, I was to some extent at the mercy of who the school allowed me access to, in terms of their pupil population. I knew, prior to securing access that I ideally wanted to conduct research with children under 13 (up to year nine in school terms). This was due to existing literature on subjects around gender, violence and well-being having focused on older teenagers. Therefore there was a slight gap in the literature around this age group. I also felt that teenagers at this age were in some ways ‘pre-teen’ or less definitive in their identities, from my previous research experiences and from the literature, and wanted to capture them during a period in secondary school when their subjectivities and identities were still being formed.

However, I did use some elements of sampling practices to decide on my research site and potential participants. As I wanted to explore the cultural world of a South Wales school, I wanted a school that is not obviously atypical, which in this region would be a private school or school with a middle or upper class demographic. Beyond that, once in Valley School I wanted a Year Eight class that also was not obviously atypical (this class being of mid-range academic abilities) and I wanted to work with as many pupils in that class as I could, not just those who were most outgoing or noticeable. I was attempting to construct a case study from which

implications could plausibly be drawn, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the ethnographic and qualitative methodology.

Other kinds of sampling used within these methods may be referred to as 'judgement sampling' or could be described as ongoing sampling. Gray *et al* reference this kind of approach to qualitative sampling when they note that "in qualitative research, sampling is often a creative, ongoing practice" (Gray *et al*, 2007: 117). This was certainly the case with this research project. Once access to the school had been agreed, I dealt with Mrs Jones who placed me with one Year Eight class. The challenges and difficulties I had getting the research off the ground initially and arranging parental consent with all the children who wished to take part, as well as finding suitable times and spaces to inform children of the research aims and conduct qualitative interviews, meant that this class was the only class I conducted research with. Though I would have liked to conduct research with other classes in this age group (and possibly older and younger age groups) the limitations of the school environment and organisation, coupled with the time and resource restraints, meant this was not possible.

Generating interest in the research with the children in the class I was allocated was difficult, not due to the children's lack of interest but due to being able to spend enough time with them discussing the research and following up on consent forms from parents. Many times I presented the research to the class and gave out consent forms to the children who expressed interest but I was unable to garner enough help from overworked staff to assist me in chasing up consent forms and reminding children to get them signed. Therefore I just kept pitching the research to the children myself at ad-hoc opportunities and, when some signed up and took part in research activities (such as the walking tour) I then asked them if they had friends in the class who wanted to take part. In this way it could be said that I used the 'snowballing' sampling technique identified by Gray *et al*. They describe this as "one of the most widely used nonprobability sampling techniques in qualitative research" (Gray *et al*, 2007: 117) and it essentially describes a situation where interest in the research 'snowballs' after initial contact has been made with a few research participants. Gray *et al* note that this technique is "especially helpful when a complete or reliable sampling frame is unavailable or when access to appropriate subjects for interviewing and observation is difficult" (2007: 177). This was certainly the case during this research, as access to subjects was difficult in terms of finding suitable times and spaces to present and conduct the research, and where parental consent was needed in order to record data. At the same time, I wanted to get the whole class to sign up to the research, as I wanted to observe and interview a sufficient range of pupils in order to justify any claims made from the data. I sought out participants with a range of different attitudes and experiences to space in the school and managed to get the whole class to sign up for the research.

The class was a co-ed class, with no BME pupils included (this is representative of the school and region; the BME population is very low in this area of Wales). All 32 pupils provided individual and parental consent to the research and to allow classroom observations take place; a further 13 took part in recorded qualitative interviews. I also conducted interviews with two teachers; Mrs Jones and Mrs Hollis.

3.8 Research Site Information

I will give a little background on the school, its location, cohort size, budget *allocation* and inspection performance (ESTYN, 2012/13). The school is located near a former mining village in South Wales, and serves a number of villages and localities nearby. Many pupils travel to school via bus or road. There are approximately 900 pupils attending the school, with 143 in the sixth form according to the last ESTYN report. In terms of its site, the school is located in the bottom of a valley, surrounded by large mountains and located near a small housing estate and a large industrial estate.

The school received a 'good' assessment in its last ESTYN report in 2012. It continued to push for good academic performance however it was under an increasing amount of pressures: the school itself had to be closed for an extended period of over a year due to structural issues, and since it's reopening many staff have voiced concerns over losing pupils to nearby secondary schools during this period. In terms of its budget per pupil it is bottom of all the schools in its local authority, and in terms of its pupil make-up it represents the full range of academic abilities and challenges. According to the last ESTYN report, around 15 per cent of the schools' pupils are on the Special Education Needs (SEN) register, and 8.4 per cent of pupils live in the most deprived areas in Wales.

The school itself is surrounded by a steel fence and gates, which are electronically controlled by the receptionists. These gates are ostensibly locked during break times and lunchtimes, as the school runs a lunchtime 'stay on site' policy – only sixth form pupils or those with a permission slip from their parents are able to leave the school at lunchtimes. Therefore the majority of the children (and certainly my participants) are literally 'locked in' the school space for the whole of the school day. My experience of entering and leaving the school was often confusing – gates were not always locked, but if they were, the intercom was not always answered, which meant at times I had no immediate way in. There was a security code to the gates but I was not permitted to know the code by the school. This may present a picture of a rather austere and security-focused school, however once inside school staff and reception were very helpful and friendly. This contrast in atmosphere is something that I feel contributes to the *unruly atmosphere* in the school – the contrast between 'official' school policies, such as the stay

on site policy (which explicitly manages space) and what actually occurs in practice, which is often far more chaotic and informal than school policies suggest.

The school itself is ordered into various blocks – art and technology, English, a different building for languages (French and Welsh) and a performing arts and music room. There is also a canteen and a gym where PE lessons take place. At the back of the school is a memorial garden, with benches and plants, and then further back is a large sports field and clay football pitch. Adjacent to the playing fields is a river which is blocked off by a fence.

At the time of writing things have taken a downturn for Valley School and it has been scheduled to be closed. This is due to falling student intake numbers and poor performance. It is a sad end to a tumultuous few years for Valley School, and it also part of the bigger picture of education in the South Wales valleys, where smaller schools are being closed down and pupils merging into so called ‘super schools’ with huge student populations and long travel times. As you may remember, at the start of this chapter, I highlighted how my initial proposed research site, the boys only school that I conducted my Master’s research in, was closed and merged with another school, and the same thing is now happening to Valley School. For the students who participated in this research, this means they must now find their way again in a completely new school space, and shows just how tenuous their school experience has been. For them, this sense of spatial instability will continue.

3.9 Access and Attendance

I was able to negotiate access with the Deputy Head of the school via my contact, Mrs Jones. Fieldwork began in January 2015 and continued until the end of summer term in July 2015. Initially, I was placed in a 9am Personal Social Education (PSE) class, on a Tuesday morning, with what Mrs Jones considered a suitable Year Eight class. I had wanted to get to know the class before beginning classroom observations wholesale, as I felt that if the children knew me a little before I appeared in their classes that it would make my presence more palatable for them and their teachers. I hoped to arrange walking tours of the school during this initial period, so that I could speak to those interested in small groups and get them to show me around the school during PSE. In this way I hoped to build rapport with the children and also get them to show me the important spaces for them in the school. This attempt to build rapport was partially successful, in that I managed to get to know some of the children during PSE, gauge initial interest in the research and collect signed parental consent forms. However, due to the fact that the regular PSE teacher was off sick and substitutes were often different each week, it was difficult for me to arrange further walking tours with more of the children, as each week I had to re-introduce myself to a new teacher and explain the research all over again.

After a couple of weeks of this rapport building, I asked Mrs Jones if she could speak to some of the classes teachers so that I could begin my observations. I began to observe lessons on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, always following the same class (8 green). The lessons I observed were English, twice a week, Welsh, twice a week, French, twice a week, and PSE once a week. I also spent some lunchtimes with the children, in the playground and later conducting group and individual interviews during lunchtimes. This fieldwork schedule continued from February/March time up until July 2016.

3.10 Data Production

I produced two key kinds of data during the fieldwork for this thesis: field notes and audio transcriptions from walking tours, individual and group interviews with child participants and two teachers. I also kept a research diary for more personal reflections on the research experience. Field notes were taken mainly during classroom observations, but also at break and lunch times and in the staff room. I had a large thick notebook that I carried everywhere with me, and once I returned home I would write up all the notes from that day into one long document on the computer. At this point I may add in reflections on the research experience of that day, or more analytical points that may have occurred to me after the research had taken place. I would also use this time to develop the research process in an iterative fashion: to reflect on relationships I was developing with the children, to ascertain who I would like to speak to next, to think about friendship groups that would like to take part in group interviews, and to consider what I should pay attention to in the following day's observations. As mentioned earlier, the focus of this research project changed considerably during fieldwork, from focusing on violence to focusing on space, and this time developing the methodology was crucial to this process. I noticed that data concerning violence and fighting was not coming up organically, only when prompted from direct questions from me, and even then was usually anecdotal at best. This caused me some concern at first, as I felt that I was not getting the data I needed. However, in discussion with my supervisors, I allowed the data and the children to guide me, attempting to remain true to the ethnographic tradition, and as I reframed my research lens using my field notes and interviews I could see that *spatial negotiations* were a key part of the children's everyday lives. This reflexive period, on the train home from fieldwork and at home afterwards, was a key part in reshaping my research focus and allowing the ethnographic data and experiences of the children to speak for themselves.

In terms of the experience of taking field notes, it was a strange but rewarding process. In class, when sitting near the children, I often felt as if I should be 'doing something'. It is a strange experience for a grown adult to sit with a group of adolescents in a classroom, with a notepad and pen: it is very subjectively confusing, as I found my subconscious reaching back to experiences 20 years previous to try and find the right ways to 'act'. Though I knew logically that I was not a

student at the school, I felt at times that my subjectivity attempted to 'fit in' with classroom behaviours and practices. Therefore writing in a notepad was apt. At first, however, my presence was a novelty to the children, and they would frequently ask me what I was writing and why. They wondered whether I was writing about certain individuals, and would tell me stories of certain amusing anecdotes from classes I had not observed that day. I fielded these questions with good humour, though never revealing what I had written or allowing the children to look at the notepad, for fear of compromising the field notes process. I used these interactions as good opportunities to build rapport with the children, and to arrange individual interviews. However, I was also clear that I could not interrupt classes or speak when teachers were talking, as I wanted to ensure that I was not seen as a nuisance by those teachers who had been kind enough to allow me access to their classes. This balance, between building rapport with the children and staying in the teachers' good graces, was at times a tricky one to maintain, but I was able to manage it throughout the research process. As time passed and the children became more used to my presence in class, these questions subsided and I was able to take notes freely.

The field notes that I took underpinned the narrative of the research experience. Once I had been at the school for a few months, I began to conduct semi-structured interviews with the children. These were audio recorded and transcribed later onto the computer. All names of participants were changed. 17 children took part in these interviews, usually in small groups of twos or threes. I also conducted interviews with two teachers, so as to gain a different voice on the experiences of the children in the school. Again, these names were anonymised and changed to protect the identity of those taking part.

During interviews, I used a semi-structured format, based on the observations I had already conducted during classes. Interviews tended to take place during lunch breaks or occasionally during class times (in a different room) when permitted by the teacher. As explained earlier, I also conducted a walking tour. I would have liked to have conducted more of these kinds of interviews, and I discuss the restraints put on this method in more detail later on in this chapter.

3.11 Finding Space for Research: Challenges of Researching Space in Valley School

This section relates to the challenges I encountered in conducting research in the school, which are elaborated on further in the analysis chapters. It also outlines my approach to researching space in this particular fieldwork setting. In this section, I wish to draw parallels between my own experience of trying to find 'space' (literally, temporally, and discursively) to conduct research, and the *spatial negotiations* of the children that became the focus for this thesis. During the

exploration of these parallels, I will draw on literature that outlines ideas on researching space with participants, particularly school spaces and young people.

Part of the reason that I became so aware of the importance of space to the children's everyday lives was that I was having similar experiences of having to negotiate space when I was beginning the research. As mentioned a moment ago, when I started the fieldwork in the school, I wished to conduct a number of walking tours with different groups of children, allowing them to take me around the school so that I could get a sense of space in the school from their perspective. I was aware of the use of so-called 'mobile methods' in social science research (Ross and Renold, Holland, Hillman, 2009) and had utilised them whilst working on a separate research project in a school ('The Boys and Girls Speak Out Project' Renold, 2013). These 'mobile methods' can provide research participants, particularly young people, with talking points and inspirations for telling the researcher about their lives. A 'walking tour' or 'guided walk' (Ross *et al.*, 2009) allows the research participant to lead the researcher through the everyday spaces and places of their lives. In Ross *et al.*'s article on mobile methods, they allowed young people to lead them "through locales of significance to them that formed part of their everyday, local geographies" (Ross *et al.*, 2009: 608) and in a similar way, I sought to use walking tours as a way to explore the school space from the perspective of the children involved in the research. I felt that in using this kind of method I would get a sense of how the children spent their days, where they went during break times, and what the different school spaces meant to them.

There was exciting potential for mobile methods and walking tours to open up the research space for myself and the participants in this research. Ross *et al.* suggest that by "focusing on the mobilities of others we can come to unravel the ways in which place itself is comprised of multiple interlacing routes" (Ross *et al.*, 2009: 609). By getting the children to lead me around the school spaces, I hoped to have a more lively discussion about what those spaces meant to them, and hoped that being in different school spaces would inspire them to talk in greater detail about those spaces and the 'interlacing routes' they took through the school, at different times and for different purposes. In this way I hoped to focus on the "lines of lives mapped out in the 'oft-repeated walks', the mundane, everyday journeys that through repetition 'produce a thicker association of the route with the walker'" (Lee and Ingold, 2006: 77 in Ross *et al.*, 2009: 609).

Certainly, the walking tour that I conducted with Becky, Drew, Matt and Phil was one of the most positive and rich research experiences that I had during the fieldwork, and the data collected (via audio recording) forms the core of the first data analysis chapter, and helped to further articulate and develop my research focus on school space. The children not only discussed their activities in these spaces in great detail, they also told me about the negotiations that they

had to undertake every break time and lunch time, attempting to find and claim comfortable spaces for themselves in the school. This walking tour provided a great deal of inspiration for the project and seemed to enhance my relationship with these children; it also served as a germ in the conceptual construction of 'nomadic negotiations of space', which is articulated further in the analysis section.

One may question, then, why I did not conduct further walking tours if the method was so successful and yielded such rich data. It certainly speaks to the challenges of conducting research in this school, as mentioned earlier. It is not my intention here to apportion blame to the school for any of these challenges: I have nothing but appreciation for them allowing me access to their school to conduct my research. However, once inside Valley School, conducting fieldwork was challenging due to the organisational chaos that existed within the school. This *unruly atmosphere* (a concept articulated further in the analysis chapters) made the practicalities of conducting research in the school difficult. Whilst I could rely on classroom observations as the bedrock of my ethnographic fieldwork, further research methods (such as interviews or walking tours) were very difficult to arrange. I wished to conduct the walking tours during the PSE class that I began observing on a Tuesday morning: however, the lack of a regular teacher for this class meant that I could not carry plans over from week to week. Taking the children out of class was a precarious request for me to make. I did not want to be seen as a disruptive influence for staff. However, it was important to me that walking tours take place during class, as I wanted to audio record them (which would have been impossible during noisy and crowded break times) and I wanted the children to feel comfortable walking around the school, and not hampered by their usual break time routines, or the presence of other groups of children.

Despite this, I could not successfully arrange another walking tour during the research. Attempts to do so were curtailed by a myriad of institutional and practical problems. I was told not to request to take any of the children out of classes which involved assessment; this meant that PSE was my only viable class for requesting walking tours take place. Even then, because of the merry-go-round of teachers involved in teaching that class, it was very difficult for me to arrange further walking tours. Cover teachers may have felt that that particular session was too important to miss, or they had not been aware that research would be taking place. Because of the nature of PSE, despite it not being assessed work, its topics related to health and social issues in the school, and teachers were often reluctant to allow children to miss a session if they felt it was a particularly crucial one.

Crucially, the research lacked a key gatekeeper within the school who could assist me in negotiating these practical problems and getting the more experimental elements of the research off the ground. As a sociologist conducting research with young people in an institutional setting,

one is often at the mercy of the goodwill and time constraints of gatekeepers and staff within these settings when it comes to effectively carrying out research. Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles. (2007) articulate the difficulties in conducting research and obtaining informed consent with young people in school settings, and highlight the importance of gatekeepers in this process. The “organisational constraints of specific research settings” (Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles, 2007: 405) can hamper the implementation of ethical informed consent, research participation and research practice. They note that “the right of gatekeepers to give or withhold access is in practice often conflated with the right to give or withhold consent, even though gatekeepers have no legal powers to give or withhold consent on their charges' behalf” (Heath *et al*, 2007: 405). Though I had difficulties in obtaining parental consent from all the children in the class initially, once I had consent from pupils, I wanted to get to know each group through the use of walking tours. This was intended to pre-empt my appearance in classes, to make it less sudden and more natural. However, because of the organisational chaos of the school I was denied the opportunity to continue to use the particular technique of walking tours with the children.

Despite having consent from the children, and despite having access from the school, I did not have a consistent gatekeeper with which to facilitate the research methods I sought to use. Mrs Jones, my main point of contact, was occasionally absent due to ongoing illness and because of this her need to spend as much time with the class as possible when present was intensified. The lack of a regular teacher in PSE further exacerbated these problems. I attempted to engage the deputy head in helping me with my problems; however, he seemed very stressed and busy and merely directed me back to individual teachers or at best a head of year. This persistent obstruction of access to a particular method (which, when negotiating access with the school, I had been clear I wished to use, and when creating interest in the research, I had told the children we would be doing) could be seen as an example of gatekeepers in institutional settings inadvertently being in a position to “silence and exclude” (Heath *et al*, 2007) children’s’ research voices and activities. Despite being given the access to the school *in general*, I did not have an ally in the school who was suitably reliable and enthusiastic about the research to help me iron out the practicalities of using this kind of method. In previous research that I had conducted in schools I had always had a willing and enthusiastic gatekeeper to help facilitate research activities, and to assist with the practical elements of research: collecting consent forms, finding appropriate research spaces for interviews, allowing access to the school for walking tours, allowing children time out of their class and so-on. Though Mrs Jones did her best to help me, she was very overwhelmed with workload and illness to be a reliable enough champion to aid me in conducting research in the ways I ideally wanted to.

This problem was in many ways related to my general experience of negotiating space in the school, and it enabled me to draw parallels with the experiences of the children. I was an interloper in the school, an authorised one, but an interloper nonetheless. I did not have the authority to claim spaces for myself, and due to the disorganised nature of the school and the institutional pressures it was under, I could not get the assistance I wanted in attempting to claim spaces for research purposes. In many ways I felt as the children felt - I was caught in the maelstrom of a disorganised institutional setting, whose needs and demands were more urgent than mine, and I was attempting to make the best of it and claim what spaces and times I could for my own (implicitly less 'important') research activities. This is similar to the *spatial negotiations* the children experience that are outlined in the analysis chapters in their everyday school lives. They attempt to mark out spaces in the school that they can call their own, but they are at the whim of individual and institutional decisions and authorities which they have no control over. The children's need for safe and comfortable spaces to call their own is implicitly seen as less important than the schools' need for discipline, order and attainment. Because of the disorganisation inherent in the school, and the pressures it was under (leading in part to it being earmarked for closure), it was unable to allocate literal and discursive space to myself or the children beyond the most perfunctory and convenient solutions.

This experience generated in me a significant tension when dealing with the school as institution. On the one hand, I had been given access to conduct research in the school, which was crucial in getting the fieldwork off the ground. I had to ensure that this access was not jeopardised by me in any way, as I myself was under time and work pressures to complete the doctoral programme in a set time frame. On the other hand, despite being given access to the school, I could not conduct research in the ways I had been told that I could, and the ways in which I had told the children I would conduct it. In this way I had to comply with the institutional procedures and practices of the school. As Heath *et al* point out, "whilst not always happy with the procedures and assumptions employed by gatekeepers, individual researchers nonetheless benefited from compliance. Most, although by no means all, experienced this as a source of considerable tension." (Heath *et al*, 2007, 414). I realised that my compliance with the schools' inherent disorganisation benefited me on a general level (I was able to continue to research in the school) but on a micro-level, and in relation to the participants in the research, it hindered us. The only way I was able to utilise this disorganisation was in the insight it gave me into the difficulties of 'making space' in the school for anything beyond essential academic attainment and maintaining institutional order.

3.12 Limitations of the Study

The advantage of ethnographic and qualitative research also inherently contains its limitations. The advantage of using ethnographic and qualitative methods is that one is able to forge a deep familiarity with a small group of people in a very specific fieldwork setting. I was certainly able to do this with the class I conducted research with, and to a lesser extent, some of the teachers who taught them. However, creating and maintaining this familiarity means using a small sample size. In total I conducted research with 32 children and 6 teachers (2 of which were interviewed). This means that the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973 in James, 2001: 247) I was aiming to create would struggle to be made generalizable to larger population sizes, or other educational and regional settings. Though all schools have school spaces (and some are generalizable e.g. classrooms, gyms, playgrounds, canteens) the specific make-up of Valley School, its students, its pressures, its architecture and location mean that attempting to make data generalizable would be fraught with problems. Therefore the limitations of this study are also its advantages - it is an unashamedly small scale, ethnographic and qualitative exploration of micro, everyday practices for a particular group of children in a particular institutional, local, regional and socio-economic setting.

The limitations presented above also apply when considering the reliability of the qualitative data that forms the core of this thesis. Indeed, one can argue that the concept of reliable data, transported as it is from the natural sciences and quantitative statistical research, is not a suitable framework through which to view ethnographic and qualitative data (Lewis, Ritchie, Ormston and Morrell *et al.*, 2013). However, though I share some sympathy with those who critique the use of these concepts in qualitative research, I also believe that qualitative research should aspire to high standards of practice and should attempt to be rigorous, thorough and reflexive. This is as much to do with honouring the experiences of the researcher and the research participants as it is to standing up to methodological inquiry. Ethically, it is pertinent to ensure that research and interpretations of data are subject to a robust methodological framework to ensure that participants in the research are represented and honoured in the analytic stages of the project. Seale, as cited in Lewis *et al.*, suggests that one way the qualitative researcher can aim to do this is to show “the audience of research studies as much as is possible of the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions” (Seale, 1999 in Lewis *et al.*, 2013, 355). In outlining in detail the ethnographic and qualitative methods used in this study, alongside the development of thorough analytical themes and concepts, I aim to show the procedures involved in designing, conducting, and analysing this research, and in this way I aim for methodological robustness whilst acknowledging the epistemological boundaries of qualitative social science research. The use of ethnographic and qualitative methods was crucial to really developing an understanding of the everyday lives of the children in Valley School. Using quantitative methods (such as surveys)

would not have yielded such rich or thick descriptive data, nor would it have allowed me to observe the centrality of space to the students' experiences of school life. This is in an attempt to conduct ethnographic research that is "sensitive to the nature of the setting and of the phenomena being investigated" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 8). I was not attempting to create generalizable data or prove a hypothesis with this research. I was attempting to get under the skin of the everyday lives of pupils in a specific school, locality and region.

Ethnographic data is unlikely to be 'reliable' in the traditional, scientific sense as it cannot be easily replicated. However, ethnographic data may be seen as more valid or more of an accurate representation of social worlds as ethnographic research allows the researcher to observe social interactions as they happen. Ethnographic research is, to some extent, immediate. The downside to this immediacy is the issue of the researchers' role in contributing to the social phenomena that they are observing. To what extent is the researcher implicated in the social phenomena they observe? In an institution such as a school this was particularly heightened, as children are immediately curious and suspicious of a 'new' adult in the classroom and school environment. I attempted to temper this reactivity through the use of practical approaches to ethnographic research (such as Boyle's concepts of least adult and least teacher, explained earlier in this chapter).

However, the ethnographer must accept that to some degree they are implicated in the social phenomena they are observing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In conducting and analysing ethnographic research, the researcher must be reflexive about their part in the co-construction of social phenomena, and must work to understand when, where and how their presence has changed the social dynamics they are observing. The concept of research reflexivity has been used in ethnographic research to attempt to ensure the researcher understands that they are implicated in the research process. Reflexivity refutes the scientific ideal of 'objectivity', understanding that the researchers' presence, particularly in participatory ethnographic research, will always change the social norms of that site in some way. Rather than attempting to meet the objective ideal (which is considered impossible and dislocating) ethnographers use reflexivity as a conceptual underpinning to ensure that they acknowledge and reflect on their own implication in the data that is recorded using ethnographic methods.

Lather (2001) goes even further, critiquing reflexivity and emancipatory research as flawed attempts at realism, and instead advocates constructing ethnographic observations into "an interrogative text that reflects back at its readers the problems of inquiry at the same time as an inquiry is conducted" (Lather, 2001: 285). I situate this ethnographic research as somewhere in between reflexivity and Lather's 'interrogative text': I do attempt to give voice to a vulnerable group of people (children in a deprived area of the UK) but I do not attempt to dictate what that

voice should say. This is evident in the change of research focus from violence to space; I foregrounded what I thought might be an issue for this children (violence) but was open to what they themselves told me and what I observed as being more central to their lives: space and *spatial negotiations*. Nevertheless I concede that I am implicated in all elements of the research process, from design right through to analysis, and attempt to use methodological approaches to ethnographic research in order to navigate this implication, whether that means minimising it in certain contexts, or using it overtly in others. In conducting ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews there were differing levels of implication and 'naturalness' to the research scenarios. In class I attempted to minimise my impact on social events, sitting off in a corner, attempting the role of 'least adult' and trying to allow events to unfold without becoming too embroiled in them. In the interview situation, I set the tone more clearly, and the situation was more contrived for the children. I was dictating the time and place of the interviews and the questions being asked. These interviews were not part of the children's normal school routine in the way that classes were. In these instances I accepted my own implication in creating a contrived research environment of an 'interview', and attempted to base the interviews on ethnographic observations to ground the questions in what I understood were pertinent elements of the children's social worlds.

Post-humanist Ethnography? Notes on the Conflict between Ethnography and Post-Humanist Research

I place this theoretical note here as a way of explicitly referring to the post-humanist work cited in the literature review, and the ways in which it conflicts and contradicts with the idea of a traditional ethnography. This is in an attempt to go some way to explain the conflicts between these two methodological approaches theoretically, and how I was caught between this conflict during (and after) my research. It also further elucidates why I can only subtly gesture to post-humanist theories and concepts in this thesis, rather than fully outlining them in a post-humanist framework.

Post-humanism and new materialism de-centre the subject. More broadly, the human knowing subject with a linear subjective trajectory formed through time and space is critiqued, and to put it more extremely, demolished. Ethnography is built on the idea that the researcher is the subject, and therefore the instrument of data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The contradiction is that the human cumulative subject is critiqued (and potentially eliminated) within post-humanism, whereas ethnography proposes that it the human subject is not only 'true' but also the instrument of research.

In Barad's agential realism (Barad, 2008) the subject only emerges or is agentially cut in the production of phenomena. As 'something' happens, subjects and objects come to exist, as

they stand, through the occurrence of that phenomena. The implication of that is that when 'I' am doing ethnography, interacting with others and interpreting the data, what's actually happening is that I am not in any way a traditional ethnographer, rather I am accountable for what is happening and part of the emergent phenomena. This entails a thorough post-human reflexivity, which is not the same as the traditional concept of reflexivity in ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). This is an ethical standpoint as much as an academic one.

"Knowing requires differential accountability to what matters and is excluded from mattering" (Barad, 2008: 380) The ethnographer that attempts to work with post-humanism, however subtly or explicitly, must understand this accountability and not merely respond or reflect their ethnographic experiences, but be accountable for their position within them. This may seem, superficially, to overlap with the traditional ethnographic concept of reflexivity. However, the post-human position is distinctive by the fact that in traditional ethnography the researcher-subject is seen to meet the participant-subject and the interaction between them is reciprocal and cumulative. In post-humanism, the researcher does not exist as a subject, and neither does the participant, until they are entangled together and then they become entangled phenomena, immersed in the agential cuts of human and non-human matter. This means that the complete synergy of traditional ethnography and post-humanist theory would be difficult (or potentially impossible), because the traditional ethnographer attempts to reach objectivity and 'truth' (whilst tempering this attempt with concepts such as reflexivity) whereas the post-humanist researcher understands that there is no 'objective truth' and that their resulting research work is a very pointed mattering. This means that the production of literal, physical, and digital ethnographic work (such as this thesis) from a post-humanist perspective, means being eminently accountable and ethical in their attempt at this pointed mattering. "Embodiment is a matter not of being specifically situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008: 377). This quote sums up this conflict between traditional ethnography and post-humanist research perfectly: the first part of the quote refers to the traditional ethnographic approach (of being 'specifically situated in the world') whereas the second part of the quote outlines the post-human approach, to the world and to research – understanding how during this research I embodied the world of in its dynamic specificity. Barad describes the difference between a diffractive research methodology and a reflexive ethnographic research methodology as such – "a diffractive methodology is respectful of the entanglement of ideas and other materials in ways that reflexive methodologies are not" (2008: 20). The diffractive methodology, suggested by Barad and used by post-humanist researchers, attempts to provide a "transdisciplinary approach that remains rigorously attentive to important details of specialised arguments within a given field, in an effort to foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries" (2008: 25). This methodology aims for an understanding

that seeks to examine the ways that the material and the discursive are entangled, and how they work together to produce specific cuts in phenomena and reality. Barad cites Haraway's critique of reflexivity (as epitomised by the traditional ethnographic methodology), noting that "reflexivity invites the illusion of essential, fixed position, while diffraction trains us to more subtle vision" (Haraway, 1992, in Barad, 2008: 29). This 'more subtle vision' is one of the key differences between ethnography and post-humanist approaches to research in the social sciences and in education more specifically.

I will not attempt a false synthesis of ethnography and post-humanism during this thesis. In many ways the conflicts between these two concepts and frameworks are implicit in this thesis. I set out to undertake what was originally a traditional ethnography, and as my research focus changed, so did my theoretical focus (Massey, 2005: Taylor, 2013) and I came to strain at the edges of post-humanism. Perhaps the well-versed post-humanist researcher would have set out a robust 'diffractive' research methodology (Barad, 2008: Taylor, 2013) instead of an ethnographic approach. However, ethnography was my main research approach, and I could not go back and retrofit a post-humanist research model on research that had already had been conducted. What I can do is refer to the conflict, contradictions (and, at times, overlaps) between traditional ethnography and post-humanist research, and subtly gesture to the ways in which post-humanist research (particularly feminist research on education, and the materiality of space) may have brought about (or apply to) the data I found using ethnographic and qualitative approaches to research.

3.13 Approaches to Analysis

Data analysis was approached thematically, and the data explored using concepts and theories developed in conjunction with the data and the literature. I have developed two key concepts which I use to interrogate and describe the lives of the children in the school: the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space', which describes the ways in which children are engaged in frequent attempts to claim space for themselves, whilst at the same time always being aware that spaces are unstable and could be taken away from them by a variety of actors, and the concept of an *unruly atmosphere* being present in the school. This *unruly atmosphere* is a conceptual conceit derived from the data and research reflections of my experience in the school, and covers everything from micro-level spatial and embodied practices (such as pushing and shoving in the corridors) to macro institutional and regional disorganisation and instability. It also refers to research into effect, particularly Anderson's research on atmospheres (Anderson, 2009) in which he suggests that atmospheres have an "indeterminate quality" (Anderson, 2009: 77) that is in part created by the human bodies in specific spatial arrangements. He suggests that "to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that

which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague” (Anderson, 2009: 77). In this way the concept of the *unruly atmosphere* is a descriptive, thematic concept that alludes to the palpable feeling of chaos and instability that I detected in the school. This concept is used to explain and describe the ever-changing and disruptive nature of the school, particularly in regard to space and spatial practices. This occurs on micro and macro-levels, with the students experiencing large scale spatial shifts during their time at Valley School. These concepts, allied to the theoretical and methodological bedrock of this thesis and the data corpus, allow me to explore thematically the children’s experiences of space and gender in the school environment. In analysing ethnographic and qualitative data, there is an admission on the part of the researcher that this analysis is not an objective process - just as the data was collected via interpretive methods, so I have enacted subjective and conceptual cuts on the data in terms of interrogating and presenting it to the reader via analysis. I develop key concepts (the *unruly atmosphere*, and the nomadic negotiations of space concepts) to articulate my analysis and identify themes throughout the data. This is in an attempt to understand that analysis of qualitative and ethnographic data is “a cyclical process and a reflexive activity” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, 10). Alongside this, the thesis is to an extent positioned within a post-structuralist/post-humanist framework, and from this epistemological perspective, data analysis would be posited as “an *artful political process*. There is no single interpretive truth” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 278). In this sense, the development of analytical concepts through which to view the data (e.g. the nomadic negotiations and *unruly atmosphere* concepts) are part of this artful political process. It must be acknowledged, when dealing with ethnographic and qualitative data, that the researcher is subjectively implicated in the production of data, and that further cuts are made to the data when undergoing analysis to fit certain analytical themes. However, this does not mean that this kind of data is not rigorous or valuable, it is just harder to measure in an objective way, and one must be aware of this when entering into analysis.

The other thing to note about the data analysis chapters is that I have used the concept of space as a loose structuring device for the chronology of the chapters. The first chapter introduces the thematic concepts and uses one rich data artefact (the walking tour) to introduce the reader to the important spaces in the school. This introductory chapter guides the reader around the spaces in the school in the same manner that I was guided around the school by the children during the walking tour. We are introduced to the playground, the corridors, the music room, the sports field, and the myriad *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in on a daily basis. The second chapter then opens out, looking at other children’s experiences of specific spaces in more detail; the corridors, the music room, and the way that *spatial negotiations* are entangled with the children’s burgeoning gendered identities. The third chapter then brings the reader into the final unexplored space of the school – the classrooms. This chapter relies heavily

on the classroom observations and ethnographic field notes conducted and produced, and brings the presiding themes of negotiating an *unruly atmosphere* in the school via spatial decisions together. In this way I attempt to guide the reader around the spaces of the school in the same way that the children experience them and in the ways that their importance became illuminated to me as a researcher.

I analysed the data thematically, that is to say, I allowed the data to breathe and for themes and concepts to become apparent. This occurred during fieldwork (most notably when I changed my research focus) and then during transcription and analysis. As the concept of space became central to the thesis, so I developed conceptual themes with which to analyse the data. Both of these concepts are an attempt to develop on the ethnographic 'thick description' and use the phenomena that I experienced and observed in the school as a way to develop new conceptual perspectives through which to view the data and the children's' experiences. By describing the children's' negotiations of space as 'nomadic' I aim to foreground the instability of the spaces they claim for themselves, and the constant repetitive nature of their *spatial negotiations*. By using this concept alongside the descriptive idea that the school had a pervasive *unruly atmosphere* I aim to attempt to describe to the reader the chaotic and unstable nature of everyday life at Valley School, epitomised for me in the children's' ongoing *spatial negotiations*.

These concepts allowed me to analyse the data in a thematic way, by focusing on the experiences of the children in different spaces around the school. I also used gender as a way to understand the experiences of boys and girls in different spaces. This allowed me to understand the data in a richer way, by analysing the interplay of space and gender. This thematic approach to analysis is consistent with the ethnographic and qualitative methodology that I have used in this thesis. Ethnographic data analysis is usually a cyclical, spiralling process. It began during field work, with initial observations, field notes, informal chats and interviews. In this process, certain categories, themes, questions, and problems started to emerge and recur, particularly centrality of space to the children's' lives. At this stage, the categories and themes were 'first order' ones – that is, modes of categorisation used by the participants themselves. Later, as I started to cluster related themes and categories, I began to develop 'second order' concepts and categories, such as the 'nomadic negotiations of space' concept. These interpretations were 'second order' in the sense that they seemed to make sense of the data even though the participants wouldn't use them themselves. It is possible that if I fed these concepts back to the participants, in language they could understand, they might see how they make sense and agree with their conceptualisations.

From here, and throughout various moments during the research, I reviewed the data corpus (field notes, interview data, and research reflections), looking across the various

components to see what might be missing, what may have been overlooked, what doesn't fit and where to go next. When the interviews were completed and transcribed, I went through each one line by line and identified thematic categories for coding – categories such as space, gender, well-being, and then drilling down further into those categories, identifying sub-categories (such as different school spaces, outside vs inside spaces, in-between spaces etc.) I compared the categories and themes with my ethnographic observations and attempted to identify whether they confirmed, added to or changed my existing interpretations on the centrality of *spatial negotiations* to the children's daily school lives, as well as the ways that space and gender seemed entangled. After reviewing the corpus, during fieldwork and in the months following, I became satisfied that the interpretations I had arrived at were fully 'saturated' – which is to say, I felt I'd absorbed as much into my interpretations as I could and was satisfied that they captured something meaningful about the social world in Valley School. The following chapters set out these concepts and themes, developed during this period, and analyse them in an attempt to answer the research questions.

Chapter Four: Nomadic Negotiations of School Space

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by introducing the key concepts I developed and used throughout the data analysis. It will go on to present analysis of interview data and ethnographic observations using this conceptual perspective. A number of themes will be developed throughout these analysis chapters – the idea that the children in this school are engaged in ‘nomadic negotiations’ of school spaces, the ways these ‘nomadic negotiations’ are constitutive and symptomatic of an overriding unruly and chaotic atmosphere in the school, and the specific ways in which different children approach these negotiations of, and through, space. A spatial spectrum will emerge, with two extremes at each end– those children that desire to find ‘safe’ spaces, usually inside the school interior, and those children that desire to ‘escape’ the confinement of the school buildings, and move outside, into larger, more expansive spaces. These categories became apparent throughout my ethnographic interactions with the children, however it should be pointed out that these categories were fluid and contradictory, with children often flitting between the two or occupying an unstable position between the two spatial approaches. This conceptual instability mirrors the spatial and institutional instability that the children experience in this school, and I will try and demonstrate the ways in which this school was particularly prone to unruliness and chaos, so as to paint a picture of the ways in which the children had to negotiate this unruliness on a day-to-day basis. At times, these experiences will be familiar to anyone who has attended a state secondary school in the UK, at other times, I will show the ways in which this idea of an *unruly atmosphere* was more pronounced and particular to this specific school, and will also demonstrate the macro institutional, local, regional and policy contexts that contribute to the creation of this unruliness and chaos. In demonstrating these experiences via a conceptual lens that focuses on negotiations of space, we can shine a light on how children in state schools in lower socio-economic areas, under academic and budgetary pressures and undergoing dramatic and constant changes actually negotiate their everyday lives. At relevant times, I will refer back to the theorisations of space that underpin this thesis (Massey, 2005: Thrift, 2003), particularly Massey’s three propositions on space (Massey, 2005). Throughout these analysis chapters, the idea that space should be recognised as “the product of interrelations” (Massey, 2005: 9) will underpin and deepen the analysis of the children’s spatial negotiations.

Introductory Concepts: Children, Nomadism and School Space

“The nomad has a territory; distributes himself in a smooth space; occupies, inhabits, holds that space” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 380 in Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 254)

“Space, then, for a child comes to fashion experience” (Jenks, 2005: 75)

This section will outline the conceptual lens I have developed to view the participants experiences of space in the school. It will outline the idea that the children are involved in ‘nomadic negotiations’ of specific spaces within the school, and will explain the development of such a concept, and the ways it can allow us to view the children’s experiences of space in an interesting and pertinent way. This concept was developed in conjunction with literature surrounding childhood and space, particularly drawing from the key works written in the “new sociology of childhood” (James, Jenks, Prout: 1998). The concept also gestures towards Braidotti’s idea of the “nomadic subject” (Braidotti, 1994 in Tamboukou and Ball, 2006), however, this is only a cautious gesturing, as Braidotti’s concept (drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, 1988) is an attempt to shift philosophical and gendered paradigms in thought and subjectivity beyond traditional humanistic approaches. My use of the term ‘nomadic’ here is a more ethnographic, descriptive and literal use of the term – whilst there is some conceptual overlap with Braidotti’s ‘nomadic subject’, I am not placing my data analysis wholesale within Deleuzian or post-human theoretical frameworks.

The concept of ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ was developed because this term seemed to capture the inherent instability present in the children’s relationships with space. A nomad wanders, they are “subjects in transition” (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 254), and a nomad has the quality not of homelessness but of having to “recreate their homes everywhere” (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 254). The nomad is always dealing with the threat of spatial transitions and changes; they do not have security in the spaces they inhabit.

In a similar way, the children’s experiences of school spaces were characterised by an inherent instability. This manifests itself in the children being involved in an ongoing process of identifying and occupying desirable spaces in the school, during breaks between classes. They engage in this process in the knowledge that they may have to move at any time, should a more powerful or authoritative group or individual make a claim, or already have a claim, to said space. They are constantly engaged in a process of “struggling to win some space’ for themselves” (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006, 258), particularly during break times and lunchtimes, and also when travelling through the “in-between” (Clark, 2010) spaces of the school, such as the corridors, during transitions between classes. During my ethnographic encounters with the children in the school, I came to realise that space does indeed “fashion experience” (Jenks, 2005) for the children. The different spaces in the school assist in constructing the experiences that different children have in their everyday school lives. Space, in this thesis, is seen as dynamic (Massey, 1994), as always being engaged in co-constructing reality with human and non-human bodies and objects. Space is also political, and is subject to institutional and social relations and movement of power. The regulation of space, the dynamism of space, and the instability of space is perhaps at its most pronounced during childhood and adolescence, when “geographical and spatial

prohibitions” (Jenks, 2005: 74) are set in place by society to control, protect, and regulate children along the terms of discourses surrounding their so-called “natural development” (Jenks, 2005).

Jenks notes that children’s experiences of these ‘spatial prohibitions’ can be “particularly paradoxical, often unprincipled and certainly erratic” (Jenks, 2005: 74), and this description certainly chimes with my observations of the children’s spatial experiences in Valley School. However, I would add that the children were very often trying to apply some kind of order to this chaos, to try and find spaces that they felt comfortable in and could occupy on a regular basis, whilst always being aware their presence in different spatial contexts was subject to regulatory controls and power relations. Jenks notes that spatial relations are subject to change, though control of that change rarely lays in the hands of children themselves. He uses the example of “the dinner table transforming into the site of drawing or painting” (Jenks, 2005: 75) though the license for this change is the prerogative of the adult or parent. This was often the case in Valley School, as the children that preferred to stay inside during break times would often congregate in selected classrooms which specific teachers allowed specific children to occupy during these times. The class, usually a site of learning and discipline, would change into a social space, however, this was always under the proviso and prerogative of the specific teacher who has allowed this change. In Valley School, many of the children (particularly the girls) in the class I shadowed liked to spend time in the music room at break times. This space, however, always had the potential to be suddenly ‘prohibited’ by the authority figures, or taken over by other groups of children.

Indeed, the main pressure that the children faced when attempting to inhabit specific spaces in the school at break times was the pressure of dealing with other groups of children, who might attempt to occupy the space they were in, or change the nature of the space, by bringing noise, aggression, physicality or sheer numbers into that space (the *unruly atmosphere* described earlier). Once this has happened, when a space has been ‘taken over’ by other children, the children I observed would then have to find another space to inhabit, or, change their attitude towards that space. This is where the idea of ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ was at its most pervasive - the children desired spaces they could call their own, but they experienced space as always open to shifts and changes, so even if they found an unoccupied, desirable space to inhabit during breaks, they knew that they might have to move and find another space at any time. There was an inherent threat of instability even at times of sanctuary and comfort. These ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ chime with the negative aspects of the ‘nomadic subjects’ concept, as Tamboukou and Ball describe teenagers in a school in their own research as being driven through “through continuous shifts and changes that sometimes exhaust them and restrict their ‘pragmatic’ mobility” (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006, 265). Whilst they are talking to some

degree about shifts and changes on the subjective level, there is some degree of similarity to the children's in Valley School's *literal* experiences of space and mobility. It should also be noted that space and subjectivity are not disparate, detached plains that bear no relation to each other, nor am I theorising space in this thesis as purely a neutral site where subjectivity is simply enacted. Space and subjectivity assist in their mutual co-construction, and the instability of space in the children's experiences seemed to give rise to the sense of 'exhaustion' that Tamboukou and Ball identified in their own research participants. This exhausting instability is a key part of the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' that I will be using during this analysis chapter, to describe the ways in which the children's experiences of space impact their quality of life and well-being in the school.

Contextualising the analysis: the institutional, local and regional picture

Before delving into the analysis, however, it is important to prefix this micro-study of the children's everyday lives with the macro institutional, local and regional contexts, as I believe that these contexts had an impact on the *unruly atmosphere* present in the school, and directly impacted the children's experiences of space. Indeed, the Year Eight class that I shadowed during my time at Valley School had already had to deal with a macro negotiation of space: when they started secondary school in 2014, making that precarious and scary leap from primary to secondary education, they did not attend the Valley School campus in Valley Town but instead were sent to an unused college campus in Hillside to have their school lessons. This is because Valley School was closed for 18 months due to structural irregularities and safety concerns in the buildings and architecture. This meant that their introduction to Valley School was marked by a particularly exaggerated macro instability of space. Though it appeared that they enjoyed their time at the college campus in Hillside, they always knew that they would have to reacclimatise to Valley School when Year 7 was over. They then had to abandon any 'safe' or desirable spaces they had discovered at the college campus, and start dealing with a whole new set of spaces in what was to them an unknown environment, an environment that the older children in the school would already be familiar with and have potentially made claims to. This macro shifting of school campus and location shows the ways in which the instability of space that the children experienced on a day-to-day basis ran parallel to large scale institutional changes and pressures the school was under. The children's very introduction to the school was marked by the obvious instability of spatial arrangements, which occurred because of institutional and political instabilities.

It is also important to note what has happened to the school since I completed my fieldwork in July 2015. Since then, the board of governors in the region has announced that they are closing the school over a two year period, due to dwindling student intake and poor academic

performance. During my time at the school, I was aware of the potential for this to happen, during informal chats with staff and teachers at the school. Many of them were concerned that the school would be earmarked for closure due to the many problems it had encountered. Surely enough, the closure they feared has been announced, despite protests from parents who are worried about losing their local school and concerned for the effect that this will have on the current generation of students.

Consider, again, the experience of the children who participated in this research project with regard to space – their first year at Valley School was marked by a drastic spatial change, their second year they had to acclimatise *back* to Valley School, and now they know that when they reach Year 11, the year of their GCSEs, probably the most important academic year in secondary school, they will be leaving Valley School and attending a completely new school in an unknown area. It is highly likely that friendship groups will be broken up, relationships with teachers severed, and learning severely impacted. The material, spatial cut of moving from a space that may have finally become familiar to another school space inhabited by children they have never met before could potentially be very jarring.

This experience is not unique to Valley School. Indeed, in my own history of conducting research in schools in South Wales, I have seen two schools that I accessed as research sites close down in this way. The likelihood is that Valley School will be merged with another school, as this is the current trend in Welsh education, especially in the disparate area of the South Wales Valleys, with its potted towns and villages spread out across a dense landscape. The rise of so-called ‘super schools’, optimised by large student numbers and located in one vaguely central location, is ever-increasing in this region, and the traditions of many smaller, local secondary schools are being eradicated in favour of these ‘super schools’. Indeed, Phil, one of my participants, discussed having attended one of these super schools in Quarry Town in Year 7, and described how he was bullied and faced violence there. He often expressed his relief at transferring to the much smaller Valley School, where he found life far easier. Now he may go through two years of anxiety at being forced to move back to such a school in his last year of secondary school. (Phil’s experiences of local spaces are further explored in Chapter 6).

This macro institutional and regional educational context paints a concerning picture of what life is like for children in this locality and region, and how their educational experiences are marked by a political landscape in which dramatic cuts and changes are being made with scant regard for pupil well-being or quality of life. It is within these contexts that my micro-study and analysis of the children’s *spatial negotiations* and experiences will be placed, and the reader should keep in mind the ways in which this ominous atmosphere at times pervaded and helped construct the *unruly atmosphere* that I identified in the school.

4.2 Nomadic Negotiations of Space: An introduction to the spaces of the school

The analysis in this chapter will primarily follow one data artefact – the walking tour of the school I conducted with Phil, Becky, Drew and Matt in March 2015. This ‘mobile method’ (Hurdley, 2010) was particularly useful in seeing the importance of space in the children’s lives at Valley School, as the students were able to literally guide my through some of the spaces of the school. Though I will use other data extracts to expand on the analysis, the use of this primary data artefact as a structuring device for this chapter is symbolic: it was one of the first, and most explicit, occasions that I discovered the importance of space in the children’s lives and experiences. By analysing this piece of data in-depth I can take the reader on a tour of the spaces in the school that will mirror the journey the children took me on. In this way I can use this data artefact as a thematic through-line throughout this chapter, in a similar way to which Hurdley (2010) did in her ethnographic research on corridors, and use it to introduce and expand on the children’s experiences of space that form the core of this thesis.

Becky: When it’s raining I’ll stay out here

Sion: Yeah?

Becky: in the rain

Sion: You prefer to be where everyone else isn’t? Yeah I remember that, cause it can get a bit hectic can’t it

Becky: I like to be all alone (Extract from walking tour interview, 17th March 2015)

This initial extract is taken from the aforementioned walking tour, and this interview was where I began to glean the ways in which *spatial negotiations* were central to the children’s everyday lives. I asked four of the children (Matt, Drew, Becky and Phil) to take me on a walking tour of the school, during lesson time so that the school spaces would be empty, and to show me around the school, telling me about the spaces as we went. As we moved through the indoor and outdoor spaces of the school, I audio recorded our conversations, and Becky’s attitude towards space seemed particularly striking to me. Becky was a girl who seemed to intentionally set herself apart from the norm or the group in the school: she frequently discussed wanting to be alone, wanting to be away from people, wanting to be inside rather than outside. In this extract, her statement of wanting to be outside ‘when it’s raining’ seemed to be an intentional subversion of the ‘appropriate’ use of the outside, playground space, as none of the other children said that they liked to be outside in the rain. Becky, in other interview statements, explicitly discusses how she hates being outside at break times, and this extract above is the only time she shows any

enthusiasm for being outside. I use this extract to lead into the idea of space in the school: space can be broken down into various categories to some degree, but all of the spaces in the school are subject to a multiplicity of material shifts which can change the way the children view and experience them. This refers back to Massey's proposition that "space is the product of interrelations" (Massey, 2005: 9), as Becky likes to be outside in the rain because it then becomes a space where she does *not* have to interact with other children. In this way, by contrast, she refers implicitly to the way in which that space changes when it is *not* raining, due to the increase in human bodies within that space, and the resultant 'interrelations' that occur during that period. The above extract also introduces the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space', because Becky is implying that she will only enter the 'outside' playground area if it is raining and vacated by the other students. She is nomadically wandering, assessing space temporally and environmentally, and deciding day-by-day which spaces to inhabit.

The other thing to consider here is to the co-constructive nature of this particular research method. The use of mobile methods lent itself to a discussion of space, and by suggesting this method, the children seemed inspired to discuss their spatial negotiations of the school. This does not mean that this data is not pertinent, rather, it means that this data is an example of the researcher being implicated in the research process. At the same time, the data generated is obviously relevant to the students' lives and this mobile method created many research insights into the children's worlds. This method also refers back to the tension between ethnographic and qualitative methods and post-humanist research techniques and frameworks (Barad, 2008: Taylor 2013), as this mobile method went a long way to refocusing the research onto the topic of space. Had I been more aware of the centrality of space in the children's lives, I perhaps would have used a post-humanist research framework and methodology to expand on their experiences theoretically and analytically. However, this was not the case, so there can only be subtle gestures to post-humanist and new materialist theory, as the research methodology for this thesis is grounded in ethnographic and qualitative traditions, which do rely on the concept of the cumulative human subject (however much I may have then seen the cracks in this tradition via post-human critiques of the human subject, and the resulting humanist research frameworks).

During this walking tour with these four children, the importance of environmental changes (e.g. weather) to *spatial negotiations* was made apparent as the children took me from the interior to the exterior of the school:

Sion: Which way should we go?

Matt: If it was summer, we'd usually go outside-

Sion: You would go outside

Phil: Because it's Wales we normally stay inside

(Extract from walking tour interview, 17th March 2015)

Here, Phil is referencing the fact that in Wales the weather and climate is often cold and wet and does not make spending extended periods outside desirable. This is a counterpoint to Becky's attitude towards being outside in 'bad weather', which she states is the only time she would wish to be outside.

As the walking tour continued, I began to get a sense of how important space was to the children, and how they had to negotiate space in consideration to other, often older groups of children:

Sion: OK, right ok. So how do you find it in Year Eight in comparison to year 7?

Matt: I feel more like free-

Phil: Harder

Matt: I feel more freedom

Sion: How come, why do you think that is?

Matt: Uh, cause like I don't feel like – whereas year 7 we were like the lowest part of the school-

Sion: It's your first year as well isn't it-

Matt: And like, like say if we go out to hang out places they might already be like taken by other people

Sion: I see so you don't know exactly where like people hang out, the older kids and stuff like that.

(Extract from walking tour interview, March 17th 2015)

During this conversation about the transition from Year 7 to Year Eight, Matt makes reference to the fact that when they were in Year 7 they were '*the lowest part of the school*' and that meant that spaces might '*already be taken by other people*'. This concept of spatial 'ownership' came up again and again, and chimes with Tamboukou and Ball's description of teenagers in secondary schools' "struggling to win some space' for themselves" (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 258). It was during this walking tour interview that I really got a sense of the importance of space to the children's experiences, and also the instability inherent in the process of trying to 'claim' certain spaces for themselves. This also links back to part of Massey's second proposition on space, where she states that space is "the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist" (Massey, 2005: 9). The children here are discussing the nuanced and subtle changes in their spatial trajectories in

the school over time, and in this way we might see a link to Massey's proposition that space is the sphere of "coexisting heterogeneity" (Massey, 2005: 9). The children themselves, using Massey's theories, are seen as inherently multiplicitous in their internal subjectivities (they are diverse, therefore, they are heterogeneous) and these heterogeneous subjects are coexisting through different spatial arrangements within the school).

The importance of age was also a key factor in these struggles for space: older groups of children might already have made 'claims' to certain spaces, and the children during this interview made reference to the fact that typically they would gather in friendship groups with children of similar ages. In schools, age is a way of structuring and ordering pupils, in a similar way to timetable and curriculum structures. It stratifies the children into smaller groups and pupils may inhabit this structure and give meaning to the various positions it creates. Becky makes reference to the music room, a key space in the school during break times, and the way in which one older girl would hang around with her and her friends, as an exception to the typical age based groups:

Sion: Do you find that – do you guys like hang around in terms of, like your age bracket or do you hang around with different people of different ages-

Matt: We have some friends

Becky: We hang around with one year 10, like all of the ones that go to music cos she hardly has any friends and she's my next door neighbour so she just comes to music

Sion: Oh so you know her from outside of school?

Becky: Yeah (Extract from walking tour interview, March 17th 2015)

Where Becky says that this Year 10 girl is one of the people that spends time in the music room, she makes reference to idea that this girl 'she hardly has any friends'. Indeed, the space of the music room during breaks seemed to be a place for the quieter children, particularly girls, to occupy, and I got the sense that this was where those children who identified as different or marginal congregated. Becky, in particular, made consistent reference to spending time in the music room and there seemed to be a division between those girls who wanted to spend time 'inside' during breaks, and those who wanted to 'escape' to the outside, to move around and be less physically confined. This links back to Massey's third proposition on space, where she suggests that we "recognise space as always under construction" (Massey, 2005: 9). The space of the music room was a space that was always under construction that changed during break times and lunchtimes into a space where children were 'allowed' to congregate in an informal and communal manner. Whilst the 'official' use of the space of the music room was to teach music lessons, the interrelations between the music teacher, their decision to allow children to

congregate there, and the types of children that congregated there (mainly female, perhaps marginalised or uncomfortable with the outside spaces of the school) we can see how this specific space is a product of 'interrelations' and "relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices to be carried out" (Massey, 2005: 9). This space (as with all other spaces) was "always in the process of being made" (Massey, 2005: 9). There is also an inherent political and gendered element to the space of the music room, and these elements (particularly of gender) of the spatial contexts in the school will be explored further in Chapter Five.

As we continued on our walking tour, specific spaces and areas of the school came into focus, and the ways in which the children defined themselves in relation to these spaces became more pronounced. The spaces of the football pitch and sports fields, which dominate the outside area of the school, are discussed by the four children in the extract below:

Drew to Phil: You usually hang around on the pitch don't you

Sion: You play sports don't you – do you play rugby?

Phil: Yeah

Sion: What about any of you guys?

Becky: No!

Sion: No? Becky's not into sports! (laughs)

Matt: Sometimes if we're bored we'll come down to the red part and play like have a mess round with the football ((Extract from walking tour interview, March 17th 2015)

Here, the boys make reference to the sports fields and their experiences on them. It is apparent that all three boys have some relationship with sporting activities. Phil plays rugby for the school and for his hometown team, and is used to spending time on the rugby pitch. Matt notes that he, Drew and their friends will 'have a mess around with the football' if they are bored (the red part he references is the clay five-a-side football pitch that sits alongside the grass football and rugby pitches). All three boys are used to spending time on the sports pitches, engaging in sporting activities (officially or casually) and enjoy some degree of comfort in these spaces.

Becky offers an obvious and striking counterpoint in her experiences of these spaces. When I asked if anyone other than Phil played sports, she immediately shouted 'No!' very loudly and bluntly, and it was obvious that she wanted all of us to know that she was not interested in sports. She appeared to identify herself in opposition not only to sports but to all external,

outdoor, physical activities, and this was elucidated further in a later, individual interview I conducted with her:

Sion: I see, yeah ok that's cool. Um and is there certain places, cos you were saying last week like you liked to hang in the music room lunchtimes right, so is there certain places in the school that you wouldn't go on a lunch break, that you just would avoid?

Becky: Like other classes, I don't mind going to the canteen at the moment cause like the music room isn't always free it's either the canteen or music room I don't go anywhere else

Sion: So you wouldn't go outside say? Why is that?

Becky: Cause just don't like it outside

Sion: Can you say why?

Becky: Cause I don't like anything to do with sports, outdoors or anything

Sion: I remember you saying that last week so...so the outside is dominated by people doing sports

Becky: Yeah basically

Sion: So like would that be kind of girls and boys or is it mainly boys out there?

Becky: its boys and girls

Sion: Ok so what is it that you don't like about that environment?

Becky: People like fight and to stay out of it you have to be indoors (Individual interview extract, 24th March 2015)

The above extract presents the ways in which Becky views and experiences certain spaces. She identifies the canteen and particularly the music room as the spaces that she wants to go, indeed saying they are the only places she goes during breaks – ‘it’s either the canteen or music room I don’t go anywhere else’. Her reaction to the idea of going outside is a strong one - she says she doesn’t like going outside because she doesn’t ‘like anything to do with sports, outdoors or anything.’ When I ask her further questions about what she doesn’t like about being outside, she states ‘people like to fight and to stay out of it you have to be indoors’. Though this may be a reactive response to my question, and more of a symbolic statement rather than a literal one (though Becky may have witnessed fighting in the playground on occasion, it was unlikely that this was happening every time she interacted with that space) we can understand that this statement is gesturing toward the overall boisterousness and physicality of the

playground. It seems there is a general atmosphere of physicality in the playground that Becky did not like, even if other children are comfortable with that same atmosphere, or even enjoy it.

These descriptions of Becky's experiences of space in some ways describe the ways in which the children are involved in 'nomadic negotiations of space'. Becky has a number of short and long term *spatial negotiations* going on in during break times. She has assessed the spaces available to her at break times, and has narrowed the desirable/available spaces that she wishes to inhabit down to two – the canteen, and particularly the music room. She has eliminated large parts of the rest of the school from her *spatial negotiations*. The whole of the exterior of the school, particularly the sports fields, because she feels there may be unruliness or violence there, and she makes a fleeting reference to avoiding 'other classes' at break times as well. At one time, she must have had negative experiences of these spaces, or feel in some way intimidated by them, and so through wandering nomadically she has found desirable spaces where she can attempt to 'recreate her home'. Again, these ideas on space link back to Massey's assertions that space is "the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist" (Massey, 2005: 9). Becky's comments above assert her 'distinct trajectories' around the spaces of the school, and her fairly adamant decisions on which spatial negotiations and trajectories to take are due to the *other* trajectories of the other children in the school – the coexistence of distinct trajectories.

However, even the spaces that Becky feels are desirable and comfortable, the spaces that she feels are 'hers', are vulnerable to becoming overtaken, closed off, or 'won' by other groups or individuals. It is not just Becky that is trying to 'win some space' for herself - all the children in the school are involved in the same process. She discusses the instability present even in her 'owned' spaces in the following extract:

Sion: How many of you would be in the music room, does it vary?

Becky: Well it depends like it's usually about 20 to 25 people, but now there's like the other years are coming in so there's like loads of others and there's about 30 of us in a room so it's like 2 classes full

Sion: Does that get a bit much? Or is that ok?

Becky: Yeah because like they're like I been going in the music room since we came to Valley School, but they, the year nine's have been coming here since like last week, so it's just like it's a bit

Sion: So it started off as being your space, and maybe the guys from your year-

Becky: There was me and 3 others and then they were inviting their friends

Sion: And now it's gone to 30

Becky: Yeah

Sion: I see, so once again you have to like kind of deal with the space being changed – being taken over by

Becky: Yeah – cause there's a load of sixth formers in there too but they been in there since they were in year seven so we can't really take that away from them (Extract from Individual Interview, 24th March 2015)

This idea of space being 'won' and 'owned' further elaborates the children's nomadic negotiations of space, as well as speaking to Massey's ideas on space being "always under construction" (Massey, 2005). Whilst the children may have specific spaces that they feel are 'theirs', the school is a finite space and therefore claims to spaces (particularly inside spaces) are always open to contestation. In the above extract, Becky describes the influx of people into the music room, and describes the various informal claims that different groups have to that space. She sees time as an important element to spatial ownership – the sixth formers have 'been in there since they were in year seven' so they have a legitimate claim to the space, whereas the year nine claim to the space is less legitimate, because they have only been coming to the music room 'since last week'. The length of time one group has occupied a space seems to be an inherent part of whether their claim to the space is legitimate or not. The space of the music room (as with all spaces in the school) could be seen as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey, 2005:9), particularly with reference to Becky's suggestions that the amount of *time* spent in the music room increases or decreases the legitimacy of that person's claim to the music room.

In analysing Becky's experience of the music room, we see a space where complex negotiations of power and ownership are occurring on a daily basis, informally and implicitly, as well as explicitly and overtly. Each group of students that enters and stays in that room has to reckon with those that are already there, those that already 'own' the space. Each group of children and each individual child has to balance their need to 'win some space for themselves' with the spatial claims of the other children that may already inhabit and occupy that space. They are dealing with not only the physical bodies of the children in that space but their emotional and practical ties to that space. If, like Becky, a child hates to be outside and has vetoed virtually all other school spaces as undesirable, then her claim to that space will be strongly emotional as well as physical and practical. These affective, emotional and political elements of spatial negotiations within the school again hark back to Massey's (1994, 2005) assertions that space and conceptualisations of space are inherently political, gendered, and filled with complex dynamics of power.

Yet, as Becky alludes to, she is also vulnerable to having 'her' space reoccupied, taken over or changed in nature by other children and indeed by the whims of the teacher that allows children into this space. The 'safety' and accessibility of the music room is entirely at the discretion of the music teacher, as Becky alludes to in this walking tour extract:

Sion: So d'you find there's like certain places in the school that are like out of-

Matt: Danger

Sion: Safe places

Matt: There's like certain places where certain stuff happens like fights and then there's the canteen where all my friends go

Sion: I see, Is that the same for you Becky, like you were saying about music-

Becky: Yeah like music it's like pretty safe cause like no one starts a fight because Miss is scary, um and if you get on Miss's nerves just ooh (Extract from Walking Tour interview, 17th March 2015)

I will give a little background on the schools spatial politics when it comes to break times shortly, however what is evident here is that the music teacher has authority in the music room despite being permissive enough to allow the children to occupy it at break and lunch times. Becky alludes again to the 'safety' of the music room as oppose to the potential for danger and 'fights' that she mentioned when talking about her dislike of being outside – 'music it's pretty safe cause like no one starts a fight because miss is scary'. The point here is that though the teacher is involved in making the space of the music room accessible and to some extent 'safe' (through her implied supervision and authority over the space) she is also the one who holds the key (literally and metaphorically) to the space, and has the strongest claim to the space. If she decided tomorrow that children were no-longer allowed in the space during breaks, then there would be nothing Becky or her friends could do about it. Therefore this sense of 'ownership' that Becky has over the space of the music room is a fragile, unstable one at best: the space can be taken over or made undesirable by the presence of other children, and it can also be changed or closed off by the ultimate authority over it, the teacher. Were any of these events to happen, Becky would be thrown back into nomadically wandering, engaged again in 'trying to win some space' for herself, and placed back into the *unruly atmosphere* present in the school. All of these spatial negotiations can be linked back to Massey's assertion that we recognize "space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2005: 9). Obviously, here in Valley School and with reference to Becky's specific trajectories and spatial negotiations, we are talking about the "intimately tiny" end of the scale of interrelations, but nevertheless, these are just as important as the immensely global (and

are linked throughout by nuanced and complex dynamics). The relations between the 'intimately tiny' spatial negotiations of the children in Valley School, and the larger areas of institutional, regional and national educational policy will be referenced at times during these analysis and findings chapters.

4.3 School Policy and Space

It will help the reader's understanding of how the children negotiate space in the school to give a bit of background on the school's policy regarding where the children can go at lunch times and break times, as well as an overview of the schools spatial makeup. As noted previously, the school operates a lunchtime lock-in policy, which means that all students (except sixth formers) are forbidden to leave the school at break times and lunch times. The school is surrounded by a metal fence and the foyer and the school gates are electronically controlled by reception. Therefore children are restricted to spending their time only in the schools grounds. Outdoors, this means large sports fields which are rugby pitches, and a clay football pitch. Alongside these outdoor spaces is a space call the memorial gardens, near the school reception, which has some plants and benches for children to sit on. The inside space is obviously the school corridors and classes. The school does not have a definitive policy on whether children can spend time in a classroom at break times – rather it leaves it up to the individual teachers discretion as to whether the children can spend time in their classes or not. In discussions with the children, it became clear that the music teacher had designated her music room as a space that the children had been given permission to spend time in during breaks and lunch. As well as Becky, many of the other children spoke about spending time in the music room or being aware of the music room as a space where others spent time during breaks.

4.4 Institutional instability and the *Unruly Atmosphere*

Sion: And did you guys find it was a big transition coming to high school, was it like quite different?

Phil: This school is quite different (from previous school)

Matt: Well I was quite nervous, but then when I got to know people like I felt more comfortable

Drew: It was annoying as well cos when we had to go to Hillside Campus all the time

Sion: Yeah it's quite far away like

Matt: I did prefer Hillside though

Sion: Did you like it Becky?

Becky: Yeah I liked sports there

Matt: I preferred the Hillside school (Extract from Walking Tour interview, 17th March 2015)

As the walking tour continued, the children began discussing the larger school space and what it was like transitioning from primary to secondary school. They made reference several times to the fact that when they started secondary school in year seven, the process was complicated for them because they had to go to Hillside college campus due to the temporary closure of Valley School (the background to this state of affairs was outlined earlier in the chapter). Drew is the first to bring this situation up, stating that it was annoying having to go to Hillside campus 'all the time'. Matt, however, offers an alternative opinion, stating that he preferred Hillside to Valley School. Becky's statement that she 'liked sports' at Hillside campus hints at how much different spaces can shape and change the children's views of themselves, and of experiences (the "coexisting heterogeneity" (Massey, 2005) of space. She stated in other interviews that she hates being outside in the playground, hates sports and dislikes gym class, yet it seems she 'liked' sports at Hillside. Whether this is purely down to the difference in space and culture at the different campus, or other issues, is difficult to ascertain, but certainly, when describing the activity of sport in these two different school spaces, she presents a differentiation between the two.

As outlined earlier, the children were exposed to spatial instability early on in their lives at Valley School, when the very structure of the institution they were joining was felt to be unstable, and they had to be 'transferred' to an alternative campus at Hillside. This potentially made their early experiences of secondary school spaces even more confused, and exaggerates the sense of their *spatial negotiations* being 'nomadic', due to them literally being transferred from one school site to another. That sense of having to 'recreate their homes' everywhere becomes more pronounced when placed into this context, and especially in light of the news that Valley School will be closing. Not only are the children involved in the normal, everyday, micro negotiations of space that all secondary school students are involved in, but they are also subject to more extreme, larger scale, macro spatial changes, where the very site of their secondary education will have been moved to three different sites. It is my contention that these macro institutional and policy pressures that the school was under contributed to the existence of an *unruly atmosphere* in the school, which manifested in a variety of different ways and informed the children's daily *spatial negotiations* and experiences. These links and interrelations also hark back to Massey's suggestions that space is "the product of interrelations" (Massey, 2005: 9) and we can see here the links again between the intimately tiny everyday spatial negotiations of the children in Valley School, and the larger surrounding organisational, institutional, regional and national picture of Welsh and UK education.

It became apparent during this discussion that Matt preferred the alternative campus that the children were temporarily transferred to in Hillside in year seven. As we moved into the canteen and discussed that particular space, he made reference to it once again:

Sion: Ok. So you can come here [canteen] lunchtime, can you come here break times or-

Matt: Yeah it's just a nice place to hang out

Sion: Yeah yeah, you can chill out like?

Matt: You can eat your food

Becky: I go to music

Sion: So you mainly go to music? That's good that they let you hang out in some of the classes, there's not massive amounts of places to go is there?

Matt: No, that's why I liked the Hillside school there was quite a lot of places to go. And cause it was a bigger place, it was like easier to get around. And like I found it more comfortable there, but this school is good as well, I just preferred Hillside (Extract from Walking Tour interview, 17th March 2015)

The reasons Matt gives in this extract for preferring the temporary campus in Hillside are centred on experiences of space: 'there was quite a lot of places to go', 'it was a bigger place', 'it was easier to get around', and 'I found it more comfortable there'. Part of transitioning to secondary school is acclimatising to the new, and often bigger, spaces of the high school: for the children who participated in my research, they had to do this twice, and as Matt makes reference to, they may have already 'won some space' for themselves at the previous Hillside campus. The instability of the claims they make for specific spaces, outlined earlier in Becky's discussion of the music room, was writ large and exacerbated for the children upon their very introduction to Valley School – they entered a new environment, knowing it was temporary, and acclimatised to it, and then, once they may have finally felt comfortable there, they were shifted to a different environment, with different spaces and different existing claims to those spaces. Let us not forget that they will have to do this, once again, upon the closure of Valley School.

The point here is to show how Valley School differs from other secondary schools in its spatial instabilities and constructions, and to show how this difference may lend further credence to the concept of the particular *unruly atmosphere* that may exist in this school. Many of the spatial experiences described earlier in the chapter, from the boys comfort on the sports pitches, to Becky's desire for a 'safe' indoor space to call her own, could potentially be found in most other UK secondary schools. However, the other spatial instabilities unique to Valley School,

exemplified by its closure due to structural problems within the school buildings, are not common to other UK schools. In this way, the children were forced to engage in more frequent and extreme negotiations of space than they would have been in a more 'typical' UK secondary school.

I would have liked to have gathered more data on the children's feelings around the school closure and their having to be transferred from one school to another in their first year. However it was apparent to me from spending time with staff at the school that this was a particularly sore subject for the school, as its reputation had taken a bit of a battering during this closure, and there were concerns that the closure may eventually become permanent (sadly, as outlined earlier, that has now come to pass). Because of the sensitive nature of this subject, and my lack of access to a consistent and private research space, I did not press the matter too much further. If the children brought it up by themselves I was happy to talk about it, but at the same time I did not want to endanger the access to the research site that I had worked so hard at negotiating.

The final part of the walking tour took us back through the canteen, and into an empty office designated for my interview by an assisting member of staff at the beginning of the day. Here, we wound down the interview by discussing the problems associated with certain spaces in the school, and the children's experiences of fighting and violence in the school. As described earlier, the initial focus of this research project was violence and fighting, and transformed over time into a focus on space. This focus on space is underwritten by the idea that there was a pervasive and detectable *unruly atmosphere* in the school, and though the same could be said of many secondary schools, the aim of these chapters is to show the ways in which this atmosphere was specific and unique to Valley School. As shown in the following extract, there were times when *spatial negotiations* and physical unruliness were combined and entangled in the children's experiences:

Becky: On my first day I came here, I couldn't find the form it was all the way at the top

Sion: Yeah I got lost a couple of times when I first came here (laughs)

Phil: I got told where to go

Sion: I had to follow teachers and you guys helped me out too, I wasn't sure what I was doing

Becky: I was dragged by a year 10

Sion: You were dragged around? What like they showed you where to go?

Phil: They grabbed her arm and started dragging her across the floor

Sion: Really? That doesn't sound very nice

Becky: I don't care

Sion: It was ok? Was she messing around, or-

Becky: No I'm just really lazy (Extract from Walking Tour interview, 17th March 2015).

Following on from our discussion of the children's transition from primary to secondary school (and the resulting transition from Hillside campus to Valley School) Becky gave us an insight into what her transition to Valley School and its specific spaces was like. She describes not knowing where to go on her first day, and how she was physically dragged across the floor by an older girl (who was nominally there to 'help' her find her way). This was potentially a disturbing physical encounter, though Becky shrugged it off in the interview with her usual nonchalance. Nevertheless, despite how she may purport to have felt about it a later stage, on her first day it seems she was involved in a difficult or puzzling spatial negotiation that transformed into a physical interaction with an older teenager. Whether one can strictly call what happened to Becky 'violent' (it was hard to discern to what extent she was 'dragged across the floor' and to what extent she was comfortable with the act) is a different debate. What can be said is that this incident epitomises a certain kind of physical unruliness that can come from negotiating space in Valley School (the 'interrelations' of space amidst different spatial trajectories, to refer back to Massey). Again, the point here is not to say that this incident could not happen in another school, or somehow make the argument that incidents of physical unruliness are unique to Valley School, rather, it is to place these incidents within a specific context, and to describe the specific *unruly atmosphere* that I experienced and felt present in Valley School. The idea of this *unruly atmosphere* is rooted in theories and research that speak to ideas on affect, embodiment and materiality, and the human subject's entanglement with space (Anderson, 2009). Indeed, Anderson, in his research on atmospheres, suggests that "we learn that atmospheres are singular affective qualities that emanate from but exceed the assembling of bodies" (Anderson, 2009: 77). This idea of the *unruly atmosphere* stems from the sense that Valley School had a particular and specific atmosphere that stemmed from (but was made up of more than) the movement and interrelations of human bodies, spaces and other materials within the school.

In short, although the incident in the extract above might well have happened in other schools, it exemplified a wider phenomenon present in Valley School: a general air of unruliness, often involving physical aggression or commotion. In this way, we can begin to understand what the children's short and long-term negotiations of space are like, and through understanding this gain insight into the kinds of experiences that these children are having in their school lives, outside of the academic routines and demands of education. This enables us to re-frame their

experiences, not simply as 'students' or 'learners' but as people, embodying and experiencing and negotiating a set of specific spaces. This extract and the analysis above could also point to where a post-human analysis of this topic and data could have carried this thesis. Becky's experience of being 'dragged across the floor' by an older girl could be seen to run in parallel with Barad's assertion that "embodiment is a matter not of being specifically situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008: 377). Becky's embodied experience, with her body being dragged across the material plane of the floor of Valley School, could be seen as her "being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008) and speaks to post-human work and other theoretical work on affect, embodiment and materiality.

As the walking tour interview wound down, the children made reference to some isolated incidents of physical conflict, though these incidents tended to be anecdotal and third-hand rather than incidents they had experienced for themselves. This was an important part of discovering my ultimate research focus on space - when explicitly discussing violence and fighting, the original thesis focus, the children offered more anecdotal rather than first-hand experiences, and even conceded that they did not feel that fighting happened very often in the school. As time went on, I realised that fighting and violence were not prominent parts of the children's school experiences: negotiating space within the school's *unruly atmosphere* was a far more crucial part of their experiences. This chapter serves as introduction to, and analysis of, the idea that the children are involved in 'nomadic negotiations of space' within the school. The next chapter develops the analysis by introducing gender into the *spatial negotiations* of the children, and looking at the ways in which gender is implicated in, and framed by, the children's *spatial negotiations* in Valley School.

Chapter Five: Exploring the Spaces of the School

5.1 Introduction

This chapter takes the ideas and concepts introduced in the preceding analysis chapter and expands them over the entire data corpus, using interview and observational data from the range of participants and taking in the different spaces of the school. The chapter will continue to build on the ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ concept as a way to view the children’s experiences of school spaces, and this time will look at the ways in which gender may have an impact on the way the children experience space. The first section of the chapter explores the ways that the female participants experienced and negotiated space. The chapter will analyse these experiences with a particular focus on their embodied experiences of space and ideas surrounding female movement and the notion of the ‘passive’ female body, and will look at the ways in which female participants considered certain spaces as desirable or undesirable in relation to their own sense of femininity and girlhood. This part of the chapter addresses gender as part of the complex process of *spatial negotiations* that the girls are engaged in, and will reference the ways in which this impacts on the ongoing “struggle to win some space” (Tamboukou and Ball, 2010) for themselves in the school, adding another layer of consideration to their already complex set of negotiations. It will also refer back to key theorisations and research that underpin this thesis, particularly Massey’s propositions on space, gestures toward post-humanist work and research on gender, space and education (Taylor, 2013) and the idea of the *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School, influenced by Anderson’s work on atmospheres (Anderson, 2009).

The second part of this chapter analyses the ways in which boys experienced space in the school, analysing the key male spaces of the football and rugby pitches. It looks at the expectations of masculinity within these spaces, in particular the ways in which the ability to endure physical pain and aggression are pre-requisites to inhabiting these spaces. It will also look at the ways that these spaces can be seen as ‘portable’, re-occurring within the children’s locality and region, and the ways in which local and competitive contexts shape the types of masculinity that are on display in them. This section also delves a little into the impact of locality on the children’s *spatial negotiations*, specifically in regard to Phil, whose experiences of bullying and harassment in his previous school and locality influenced the family’s decision to move to Valley Town and Valley School. This part hints at the ways in which *spatial negotiations* spill out into the surrounding locality and region for the children. This chapter links back to ethnographic observations of gender in the school environment (highlighted in the literature review), particularly Frosh *et al*’s analysis of young masculinities in the school environment, and the ways in which teenage boys may be ‘engaged in the process of identity construction in a context in

which there are few clear models and in which the surrounding images of masculinity are complex and confused,' (Frosh *et al*, 2003: 84).

This chapter will also analyse the ways in which the “in-between” (Clark, 2010) spaces of the school, particularly the corridors, are experienced by the children when moving from class to class, and will show the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school manifests itself in this spatial and temporal context. This part of the chapter will look at the “material context” (Lawn, in Clark 2010, Hurdley 2010) in which these routinized practices of chaotic, physical unruliness play out in the space of the corridors. It will also look at the way that institutional ‘unruliness’, instability and disorganisation has an impact on the way this ‘unruliness’ manifests itself in the specific spaces of the school corridors, and will analyse field note observations and interview data on how the participants experience this particular space at a particular time. This is particularly relevant to Rachel Hurdley’s work on corridors, and her work on “corridor cultures” (Hurdley, 2010) and this analysis will draw comparisons and depth from her insights. The chapter overall will paint a picture of the complex nature of the children’s *spatial negotiations*, across different participants, spaces and times, in an effort to further elaborate on the children’s ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ and the ways in which they practice these negotiations.

5.2 Gendered Spaces: Girls Experiences of School Spaces

This section of the chapter considers the ways that the female participants in this research project experienced specific spaces of the school. As we saw in the last chapter, Becky had a very particular attitude towards space in the school, seeing the outside areas as dangerous and unruly, and the inside spaces, particularly the music room, as safe and desirable. Using different sets of interview data, I will show the ways in which different girls experienced outside and inside spaces differently, and how this diversity links up to the ‘nomadic negotiations of space’ concept outlined in the previous chapter. There will also be links made between girls’ experiences of space and their sense of embodied freedom and movement: these experiences will be viewed through the lens provided by feminist ethnographers such as Stanley (1986) and Renold (2005, 2013) on restrictions placed on the female body in school environments and the ways in which girls may subvert or disrupt such restrictive ‘passive girl’ stereotypes.

The first extract is from an interview conducted with Joanne, Stacy and Emma. This friendship group seemed to spend a lot of time together and offered up an alternative take on space than had been presented to me by Becky and some of the other girls in earlier interviews and observations. It outlines where the girls spend time during their lunchbreaks. By the time I had begun conducting the bulk of the interviews with the children, I had begun to notice the importance of space to the children’s daily school lives, and so decided to focus on that topic for most of the group interviews.

Sion: So, guys what would you normally do like on a lunch break, obviously you've come here today but where would you guys normally hang out?

Joanne: We normally go and have our food and then go outside and sit on the field

Sion: So you normally hang out outside?

Stacy: Yeah

Sion: Cause like when I was speaking to some of the other kids some of them say they like hanging out outside, some of them say that they don't like it so much, how do you guys feel about it is it alright?

Stacy: Yeah

Joanne: I like it

Sion: Yeah? Whereabouts do you go, just by there is it? [Indicates out of the window]

Joanne: By there next to the red ground, watch them play football and that

Sion: So you watch them play football do you?

Joanne: And sometimes we'll go in the memorial garden and just sit down (Extract from group interview with Joanne, Stacy and Emma, 21st April 2015).

These girls offer up an alternative and contrasting view to Becky's (admittedly extreme) view of the outside spaces of the school - where Becky hated being outside and found it to be a place of sports and fighting, Stacy, Emma and Joanne state that they like being outside and even choose to hang around in the spaces near the sports and football pitches. Indeed, the fact that I mentioned that 'other kids don't like to be outside' in the interview could have prompted them to change their answer in order to fit in with what they may have imagined I wanted to hear. Instead, their response underscores the extent to which they really do like to be outside, and perhaps suggests the extent to which they may want to distance themselves from 'girls who like to stay inside'. This implies an alive mode of distinction within the pupil's culture.

The girls elaborate on their experiences of being in 'outside' spaces in the following extract:

Sion: And how do you find it outside cause some of the guys were saying like they like it, you know some people are doing sports some people are doing things, other people are like oh it's a bit full on sometimes it's a bit rough and tumble, what do you guys think?

Joanne: I really enjoy it, it's nice

Stacy: its fine, it's like a break type of thing, from the buildings

Sion: From the buildings?

Joanne: Yeah cause in summer it's too hot

Sion: So you find it too hot sometimes?

Joanne: Yeah

Sion: Cause it was quite hot in English wasn't it?

Joanne: (Sighs) yeah

Stacy: Yeah

Sion: Sun coming through-

Joanne: English is always boiling in the afternoon

Stacy: it's like straight on you

Joanne: It was boiling

Sion: Yeah ok. So it's nice to get outside, out of the building. Yeah and is that because maybe to do with the temperature, is it also maybe to do with the space In the school, maybe like

Joanne: Yeah think it's like just having a break, chill out talk to your friends

Stacy: Yeah, you're there you have room to chill

Sion: Cause it's quite nice sort of in terms of the scenery here isn't it, d'you know what I mean, you've got mountains and stuff like that, d'you guys like looking at that kind of thing?

Joanne: Yeah like when you look at other schools they've just got a concrete yard, and they haven't got as much (Extract from group interview with Stacy, Joanne, and Emma, 21st April 2015)

Once again, when I suggest that some of the other children I had talked to disliked the outside spaces, Joanne and Stacy were at pains to point out that they enjoyed being outside, and they gave reasons which may provide insights into their spatial experiences in the school. Stacy describes being outside as being 'like a break from the buildings', and other participants in other interviews describe wanting to be away from the confines of the inside, structural spaces. The girls elaborate on why they want this break from the buildings, stating that the school can get 'too

hot' at times. Indeed, that very morning the April sun had been blazing through the windows in the English class, and I had noticed myself how hot it was in that room. There was a sense from discussing that with the girls that being outside was an escape from a certain restrictive atmosphere 'inside', which was compounded by the weather and lack of air conditioning or other technology to adjust the environment and temperature in classes.

Though I do lead the girls into this discussion on space, they are happy to talk about it and do not need much prompting to discuss it, which implies they already have opinions on the subject. When conducting these group interviews with the children, I was at pains to keep the discussions flowing, as we had limited time and space for them (they usually took place at lunch time in an empty classroom) and therefore at times I had to prompt the children a little. Despite these prompts, I felt that Stacy's observation that there is 'room to chill' outside gives further credence to the notion that for some girls, negotiating space was about negotiating the desire for movement, and the desire to escape from the confines of the classroom and the school structures. This idea of escaping the confines of the inside spaces came up with some of the other female participants that I interviewed.

Stacy, Joanne and Emma further elaborate on the challenges of negotiating the spaces of the school in this next extract:

Stacy: Half the school is like blocked off so we can't go there anyway

Sion: You mean actually in the school grounds?

Stacy: Yeah just blocked

Joanne: Like some girls just hang out in the toilets and that's just-

Stacy: Yeah

Sion: You don't like to do that?

Joanne: No

Stacy: No

Sion: Do you know why they do that? Do you know why they hang out there?

Joanne: To listen to music

Stacy: To chat

Joanne: Chat and music, but it's not somewhere I want to be

Stacy: The changing rooms some of them do

Joanne: Oh the changing rooms I wouldn't hang out in there ((Extract from group interview with Stacy, Joanne, and Emma, 21st April 2015)

Here, the girls allude to the fact that some of the school is still 'blocked off', due to the school closure and the structural irregularities that had not been rectified in some of these spaces. They then go on to say that some girls hang out 'in the toilets' and 'the changing rooms'. The girls in this interview obviously dislike the idea of hanging around in the toilets, and spending time in these spaces recreationally. This occupation of the toilets by some girls may speak to feminist literature on class and gendered spaces. Skeggs (2001) points out that "toilets, as Sally Munt (1998) and Judith Halberstam (1998) have argued, are uncomfortable liminal zones where gender is tested and proved. They are local arenas for the use and trading of cultural capital and they are dangerous places where failed womanhood is reflected" (Skeggs, 2001: 304). This idea of the toilet as a place where "failed womanhood is reflected" may give an insight into why Stacy and Joanne dislike the girls who spend time in the toilets recreationally. They may be seen as examples of the 'failed female' who seeks to hide herself away and remain passive, indoors, hidden in undesirable spaces. It may also be the case that the girls in this school have to carve out these marginal spaces as their own as the boys get the more 'legitimate' male spaces of the sports pitches and playground, and that the girls who spend time in the toilets recreationally do so because they are 'girl only' spaces (which do not exist anywhere else in the school). It appears that the interviewees in the extract above may see themselves as more 'popular' girls who are able to move across spatial boundaries, and therefore may view the girls who spend time in the toilets during breaks as restrained and hidden.

Though I would have liked to have found out more about the girls who spent time hanging out in the toilets, as a male researcher I felt that it would have been difficult and ethically inappropriate to attempt to elicit more information on this subject, or find out to what extent this culture of girls hanging out in the toilets existed. I also felt awkward in asking questions about the female toilets and what might occur there. Nevertheless, Stacy, Joanne and Emma all dislike the idea of hanging out in these spaces and what it might say about them, which seemed to have a strong gendered component.

The reason I highlight this extract is because it offers a glimpse into the ways in which the female participants experience their 'nomadic negotiations of space'. Their negotiations of space are to some extent gendered; they are negotiating not only the spaces themselves but the implications of those spaces for their own developing gendered selves. This particular group of girls seemed to be one of the more popular and confident friendship groups I observed in this

class, and this seemed to be echoed in the ways in which they negotiated and experienced space – they did not want to be confined to the buildings during their break times, they dislike girls that would spend time in the toilets recreationally, and they have no apparent fear or apprehension at being close to the sports pitches or the boys outside. They seemed to take pride in being mobile around the school, in not being afraid of spaces that perhaps other children, particularly girls, were apprehensive of. The girls all seemed at pains to point out that they did not occupy these spaces that they disliked, and that they were proud that they spent time outside; this was indicated not only in their words but in their tone. Their particular acting out of their own embodied femininity (Paechter, 2010) involved going outside, moving around, and categorising those girls who did not do this and whose “distinct trajectories” (Massey, 2005: 9) of space differed from their own as embodying a different (and perhaps less desirable) kind of femininity.

This idea of the female participants being split between those who spend time ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ was further developed during my interview with Tracy and Sarah, highlighted in this extended extract below:

Sion: Ok, alright. So do you find the people in your year tend to hang out on the field?

Both: Yeah

Sion: And is there like a big group of you that hangs out?

Sarah: Yeah

Tracy: Yeah it's mostly the boys in our year, and the girls normally go in the music room, stay in the canteen

Sion: Oh right ok. But you guys don't go in the music room?

Sarah: No

Tracy: No

Sion: So, like, is it – would it be the boys, some of the boys from this class?

Tracy: Um, some of them yeah

Sarah: Yeah

Sion: Yeah, ok. So how come – if most of the girls go in the music room, how come you guys don't?

Tracy: Because –

Sarah: Boring-

Tracy: Yeah

Sarah: Boring, people in there just, just don't like-

Tracy: People

Sarah: Yeah (laughs)

Sion: They don't like people?

Tracy: I don't like people

Sarah: No, we don't like people

Sion: Oh you don't like people! You don't like them?

Tracy: No

Sion: That's fair enough, like what sort of stuff do they do, like-

Sarah: Just sit in there, and just talk, and then it's like loads of year nines in there and everything, so it's better to go outside

Sion: Yeah, is it like cos there's more space as well?

Both: Yeah

Sion: So I imagine in a little-

Tracy: it's better as well, cos you can like move round

Sion: Yeah, you can move around.

Tracy: Yeah

Sion: Yeah, so you're not just – cos I guess you spend all day in classrooms, so lunchtime, you probably wanna get outside don't you

Tracy: Yeah

Sion: you know, if you're then going to another classroom, just to hang out, is that part of it d'you think?

*Sarah: Yeah, it's just no point in going from classroom to a different classroom, in your spare time
(Extract from group interview with Tracy and Sarah, 18th May 2015)*

There is a lot to unpack from the above extract, however it can be seen that in the same way as Joanne, Emma and Stacy disliked being confined inside by 'the buildings', Tracy and Sarah want to be outside, to be able to 'move around' as Tracy says. This extract also further develops on the notion that certain spaces have a gendered component for the female participants: these two girls highlight the music room as being somewhere that they dislike, but that is also somewhere that in their assessment 'most of the girls hang out' in. The music room seems to have a gendered component for many of the female participants. For some (like Becky, and others such as Anita and Rachel) the music room is a safe place, a place away from the rough and tumble unruliness of the outside spaces, with a sense of community inherent in the space. For others, like Tracy, Sarah, Joanne and Stacy, it may be indicative and symbolic of a kind of femininity from which they want to dissociate themselves – one that is perhaps too passive or timid but is certainly 'boring' and lacks movement and physicality. They seem to kick against this physical passivity, by asserting their dislike for the inside spaces occupied by the girls (the music room, toilets and changing rooms) and asserting their desire to be outside, 'moving around'. Once again, the notion of specific spaces reflecting back 'failed womanhood' seems to have a part to play here - some girls are highlighting specific, inside spaces as indicative of a kind of femininity that they do not wish to be associated with. This may link back to ideas on the notion of 'passive girlhood' (Stanley, 1986) or Paechter's observations on the ways in which 'tomboy' girls attempt to combine and embody elements of masculinity within 'acceptable' forms of femininity. In asserting their embodied physicality as part of their femininity, the girls in these extracts are specifically discussing the ways in which their gendered performances of this kind of girlhood are linked to their entanglements with specific school spaces. These experiences of spatial entanglement's and embodiments may also refer back to ideas on affect suggested by Massumi and Anderson. Indeed, Massumi suggests that "humans orient more by the "shape of the space" than the visual characteristics of what's in it" (Massumi, 2002: 180). The girls who enjoyed the outside spaces in the school were not making visual decisions in a linear, discursive, symbolic way: they were moving intuitively, via the "shape of the space" and via prior practices which were perhaps *filtered through* discursive, material, spatial and environmental changes day-by-day.

Despite their assertion that they enjoy being outside, Tracy and Sarah highlight some of the challenges of spending time outside at lunchtimes:

Sarah: Yeah, when they're all playing rugby, and they're kicking the ball up in the air, and it's gonna hit you in the head or something

Tracy: You're scared that you're gonna get hit

Sion: Do they do it on purpose, or is it just that they're playing rugby near you?

Tracy: It's just that they're playing rugby

Sarah: Yeah

Sion: Ok, ok, and would that mainly be boys that's doing that

Sarah: Yeah. (Extract from group interview with Tracy and Sarah, 18th May 2015)

They describe hanging out on the sports field as fun, but also highlight that there is a danger of being hit by the ball being used in the sporting games outside. It is worth noting that even with the girls that like to be outside on the sports pitches, they are very rarely actually playing sports: Joanne, Stacy and Emma say they like sit and watch the boys play football, and Tracy and Sarah describe having to negotiate the rugby games (but do not describe playing football or rugby). When I asked Tracy and Sarah about girls playing sports at lunchtimes, they conflated sports in games lessons and sports at lunchtimes:

Sion: So when you're out on the field, whether it's you guys or like you know other kids from other years, is it, does it tend to be boys play sports, and girls don't?

Tracy: Yeah, some girls play sports at um outside but sometimes they'll play bench ball if it's on in the-

Sion: What's bench ball?

Sarah: You just stand – it's like netball, but instead of-

Tracy: You gotta stand on a bench and then you gotta throw it to the person on the bench and when you throw it to the person on the bench you can stand on the bench

Sion: Ok, right ok, so do you guys play that?

Tracy: in games, we don't play it at lunchtimes

Sion: Not at lunchtimes, ok, so other than bench ball, like when you're out on the field it tends to be the boys that are playing sport

Tracy: Yeah (Extract from group interview with Tracy and Sarah, 18th May 2015)

This game of 'bench ball' is a variety of netball and is played during games lessons. Tracy does say that 'some girls play sports at um outside' but when I ask if it tends to be boys playing sports at lunchbreaks she says yes. Though the question is leading, we can presume that Tracy would have contradicted me if girls commonly played sport outside during breaks. I am trying to paint a picture of the nomadic negotiations of space that the girls in this school were engaged in, and the

ways in which those negotiations, and those spaces, have a gendered quality. There is a wealth of literature on the ways in which boys in schools use sports to commandeer and take over spaces and relegate girls to watching and moving around them (Renold, 2005; Stanley, 1986), and the point I am making with these extracts is that the gendered quality of the spaces was yet another factor that the girls in this school had to assess when negotiating school spaces. This adds yet another layer of complexity to their daily *spatial negotiations*, as the spaces they decide to spend time in during their break times may have an impact on how they are seen by their peers. This can be seen in the apparent distaste that Stacy, Joanne and Emma had of the girls who hang out in the toilets and changing rooms, and to some extent the opinion that Tracy and Sarah have of the girls who hang out in the music room. The spaces that these girls occupy during their lunchbreaks may say something about their gender identities and ways of being 'girl', and their entrance into adolescence, and this is yet another factor for them to consider when engaging in their negotiations of space. It also perhaps makes their negotiations of space even more nomadic than the boys, because they do not have such a legitimate, gendered claim on spaces such as the football and rugby pitches. The spaces they can occupy are smaller, less legitimate, and suffer from a vulnerability and porousness that perhaps the 'boys' spaces do not. This instability is discussed by two of the other girls I interviewed, Rachel and Anita, in a group interview I conducted with them and a male participant, George:

Sion: So Anita, what do you normally do on a lunch break?

Anita: Uh, I normally catch up with my friends, and go to canteen, if it's nice and sunny I'll go out on the field, um, or I'll just go to form

Sion: Yeah so there's a few different places you can go, so you could go to the canteen, you could go to your form class?

Anita: Yeah

Sion: Is that true for all you guys?

Rachel: Yeah

George: Uh yeah it depends, the form teacher, the form tutors don't tend to let us in unless it's raining –

Rachel: Or like teacher has to be there

George: Yeah

Sion: Ok, and then if it's um if you go outside that's if it's like good weather yeah?

All three: Yeah

Sion: So depending on kinda what the situation is, you might have to hang out somewhere different?

All three: Yeah (Extract from group interview with Rachel, Anita and George 24th March 2015)

The key lines from this extract are the final two - *Sion: So depending on kinda what the situation is, you might have to hang out somewhere different? All three: Yeah.* Rachel and Anita seemed to occupy a position somewhere between Becky (who hated being outside and only ever went in the music room) and Tracy, Sarah, Joanne and Stacy, who voiced their dislike at being inside and wanted to go outside at break times. They occupy the middle range in the spatial scale I mentioned in the first chapter, where children may prefer to be 'safe' inside or 'free' outside. For Rachel and Anita, their nomadic negotiations of space fluctuated between the two ends of this spatial scale, and they had an ambiguous relationship with both the outside and inside spaces. Their trajectories and relationships with specific school spaces seemed perhaps more temporal and changeable than other girls I interviewed. This again also refers back to Masumi's ideas on embodied movement, space, and affect. He states that "the cognitive model assumes that visual cues are somehow used to calculate distances, as if our brains were computers preprogrammed in inches and feet" (Masumi, 2002: 181). His critique of this model (which overlaps with Massey and Thrift's critiques of traditional humanist notions of static space) asks questions about experience, movement and space – "isn't it more plausible instead that our bodies are habituated in steps?" (Masumi, 2002: 181). Anita and Rachel's descriptions of their own spatial negotiations seem to chime with these ideas. Though they have a *sense* of what spaces they prefer, and where those spaces are, they do not cognitively and thoroughly navigate space in a linear way. Rather, they (and the other children) seem to embody space via a "qualitative space of moving, step-by-step self-reference" (Masumi, 2002: 181). They sense their way through and in spaces – their interrelatedness is an embodied one, and their bodies are entangled with the materiality of the spaces they move through and with.

As for the specific spaces they *do* like to occupy, Anita seems to enjoy being outside more than Rachel, and Rachel likes to go to the music room.

Anita also flags up a potential danger in one of the inside spaces:

Anita: I don't like the foyer, by the gym, because there is a lot of year nines there, and they tend to like mess around a lot, and I get a bit scared walking past them cause I don't know any of them

Sion: Is it like, when they're messing around is that kind of – what kind of, how does that sort of manifest itself, what does it look like?

Anita: Like it's just not-

George: They push each other around

Sion: That's what I mean, it's pushing and shoving

George: Yeah

Anita: Yeah

George: They like mess around and jump on each other's backs and push each other over and stuff like that

Anita: Yeah

Sion: Is that sort of boys and girls?

Anita: Boys and girls

George: Yeah both (Extract from group interview with Anita, George and Rachel, 24th March 2015).

Anita highlights the space of the foyer near the gym as somewhere she is 'a bit scared' of, and George highlights the unruly 'pushing and shoving' that happens in this space. Again, the idea that spaces are experienced in a sensory, affective, emotional way is brought to the fore here. For Anita the inside of the school is not necessarily always safe – it has its intimidating, perhaps slightly dangerous spaces as well, spaces where the *unruly atmosphere* of the school overflows into a more threatening physicality. Anita, when talking about spending lunchtimes outside, again brings up the idea of being 'free' or 'open' in space:

Sion: Ok. And how do you find it, cause you know you were saying sometimes you go outside, how do you find it hanging out outside, is it-

Anita: Its fun

Sion: Yeah? What do you like about it?

Anita: Uh cause you get to just like have open space

Sion: So you like the space?

Anita: Yeah, instead of being cramped somewhere (Group interview with Anita, Rachel, George, 24th March 2015)

This sense of escaping from the confines of the 'inside' spaces into the 'open space' of the outside echoes statements in previous interviews with Tracy and Sarah, and Joanne, Emma and Stacy. Anita even says that she literally likes the expanse of space outside, and feels it is a better alternative to being 'cramped somewhere'. This may chime again with Massumi's suggestion that humans navigate and experience space by sensing and orienting more by "the shape of space" (Massumi, 2002: 180) and that "the brain's ability to orient increased the emptier the space" (2002: 180). Though the playground is rarely empty of human bodies at break times, it is nevertheless a vaster, more open space, and perhaps that is what was what made it desirable. However, on the other hand (and perhaps particularly for the female pupils) these open outside spaces were also potentially dangerous, unruly, and difficult to navigate *because* of the specific human bodies and their spatial trajectories combined there. This tension seems epitomised in Anita and Rachel's ambivalent, fluid descriptions of their favoured spaces in Valley School.

Combining Anita's statement about her enjoyment of the open outside spaces with her earlier statement about the danger of the foyer (one of the main thoroughfares in the school) we begin to build a picture of her specific *spatial negotiations* (her 'distinct trajectories' as Massey might define them) around the school, and the way that she views specific inside and outside spaces. Anita seems to want to avoid the *unruly atmosphere* that is present in the foyer, and may perhaps be exacerbated by the presence of large amounts of bodies in cramped inside spaces. However, Rachel offers up a different attitude to inside spaces, specifically the aforementioned space of the music room:

Sion: Yeah yeah, ok. And what about you Rachel, what do you do?

Rachel: Um, I usually go to the music room, because that's where we all go, um, and if it's a nice day like we've had a few recently, we go outside

Sion: Yeah so again depending on – so with, when you go to the music room are you always allowed in there, or is it only-

Rachel: Yeah we're always allowed in there

Sion: You are? And is that just like – that's that particular teacher lets you use that-

Rachel: Yes that particular teacher

Sion: Yeah ok I see – do you like it, d'you prefer hanging out in the music room

Rachel: Yeah

Sion: You prefer that to outside? Yeah, how come?

Rachel: Um, it's just like you sort of get the sort of community, it just feels like you're welcome there (Group interview with Anita, Rachel, George, 24th March 2015)

Rachel's attitude to inside and outside spaces is less binary than, say, Becky's apparent experiences of those spaces, where she hated being outside and almost exclusively wanted to be in the music room at lunch and break times. Rachel says that she does mainly go to the music room, but that if it's a nice day she will go outside. Again, her experience of space is sensory and embodied rather than discursive or linear. Her definition of what a 'nice day' is may be open to interpretation, and the way in which the niceness of a particular day is evident will again be a sensory, affective, embodied experience. She is using senses to orient herself to the affective "shape of space" (Massumi, 2002).

Her reasons for liking being in the music room are highlighted in the final line of the extract, where she states that there is a sense of community there, and that 'it just feels like you're welcome'. This contrasts with Becky's reasons for liking the music room, which were based on slightly more urgent needs of avoiding 'fighting' (in Becky's words) and physicality in the playground, and feeling 'safe' (though she did also highlight that she had a community and friends there).

In terms of the spatial spectrum between 'inside' and 'outside' spaces, it seems that for those children who prefer to be inside at break times, they often want to be in specific, pre-selected inside spaces, particularly the music room. The *unruly atmosphere* seems to be intensified in certain inside areas of the school where there may be a crush of children and where bodies come into close contact with one another. Rachel discusses this in respect of the inside space of the canteen:

Sion: What about you guys is there anywhere you don't like to go?

Rachel: I don't really like going to the canteen, because it's crowded around like when lunch first starts with everyone getting dinner

Sion: So that's like people buying their lunch?

Rachel: Yeah (Group interview with Anita, Rachel, George, 24th March 2015)

It seems that for Rachel, she does not wholesale prefer 'inside' or 'outside' spaces, but rather specific inside spaces (such as the music room) and outside spaces under certain conditions (e.g. when the weather is fine). This complex sensory assessment of specific school spaces is likely occurring every day, with refinements occurring frequently, reflecting environmental changes, teacher discretions, and friendship groups, as well as personal interests e.g. sport. Again, the

spatial negotiations of the pupils chime with Masumi's ideas on the embodied, sensory ways in which people orient themselves towards space, as well as with Massey's (2005) propositions on the interrelations of space and the distinct human trajectories that coexist in the multiplicity of space. As we have also discovered throughout this chapter, for the female students in this school there is a particular embodied gendered component to their 'nomadic negotiations of space', which adds yet another layer of complexity to these myriad daily *spatial negotiations*. The experience of different spaces, inside and out, may be seen to say something about the girls' gender performances, and gendered peer group attitudes towards different spaces may affect their desirability. This gendered component makes claiming spaces for the girls potentially even harder than for the boys, as they do not 'own' such large, legitimate spaces as the rugby and sports pitches. This difficulty in claiming stable spaces as their own is discussed in the following extract:

Sion: That's kind of where you normally go. And Rachel you don't tend to go outside so much were you saying?

Rachel: If we do go outside then we're probably in the memorial gardens, but recently loads of year seven boys always like run around and play games

Sion: Is that irritating?

Rachel: Yeah

George: Big time

Sion: Why so?

Rachel: Cause you just get used to going into that one place, and when other people are there you sort of feel like, oh

Sion: So they're like there, and you were saying they sort of run around a lot, so they kind of like quite rough,

Rachel and Anita: Yeah

Sion: And you're just trying, wanting to like chill or relax

Rachel: Yeah

Anita: Some of them, I know, and they are quite like rough, so whenever I'm near there they always like shout things to you, and that makes me embarrassed, but it's quite funny as well, but the fact that they run round and push everyone is a bit – do I want to go over there?

Sion: Yeah that makes sense. So you're kind of like even though sometimes you know them and they might be funny, if you're not in the mood for that, it's like you gotta go somewhere else

Anita: Yeah (Group interview with Anita, Rachel, George, 24th March 2015)

Though I supply the word 'rough' that Anita then re-uses a few lines down, it is worth acknowledging that, although I introduced the term, the children convey a clear sense that the younger boys' presence in what had been their space is unwelcome and that is at least partly due to the fact that they are noisy and physical. Rachel's statement about the instability of 'claimed' or desirable spaces is telling. She says '*cause you just get used to going into that one place, and when other people are there you sort of feel like, oh*'. That exclamation of 'oh' can obviously be interpreted in different ways, but the implication from her tone of voice was that there was a kind of resigned feeling of 'oh, I have to change spaces again'. This is why I feel that the descriptive concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' is so apt – the children, particularly the girls, can never have total security over the spaces they claim or desire, and those spaces are always open to sudden and drastic disruption and usurpation. For adults, or policy makers, or teachers or other professionals looking in, they may feel that these problems and negotiations are just part of being in school, just part of how children interact, but from my ethnographic observations and interviews I have found that they take up a large proportion of the children's daily thinking in school, and they are involved in constant, iterative spatial assessments that have complex and changing criteria, that may include crucial psychological and subjective elements of gender, or avoidance of physical harassment and harm. Understanding what life is like for school children outside of the academic and pedagogical concerns is important, because it enables us to see how other factors impact children's well-being and quality of life in schools, and the way in which daily negotiations of space and other factors impact their subjective and physical selves.

I shall finish off this section with a final extract from the group interview with George, Anita and Rachel, wherein George articulates eloquently the exact instability of *spatial negotiations* I am discussing:

George: The other thing is as well like in the canteen I dunno why but different year groups of people find their own tables don't they, for instance I got one like in the middle it's not mine but it's like where I like to sit by the window and stuff and then for instance you lot all go and sit over there in the other corner by the old coffee place, and it's because it's your I dunno it's not yours but you feel like it's your place to sit and your thing and then one day you'll come and loads of people is in your seat and they're like well where do I sit now, cause I don't like sitting any other place in the canteen

Sion: I suppose you get used, you're like that's my place that's where my friends hang out that's where I hang out and then one day you turn up and then maybe there's-

George: everyone else is there you're like-

Sion: Then you've gotta move again

All three: Yeah

Sion: Cause that's what I'm getting from the other interviews I've done, that's the feeling I'm getting is like in between sort of classes obviously lunch breaks and whatever, you've kinda gotta think about where you can go, where's like sort of nice and chilled out and safe and whatever, and then sometimes that changes, and then you gotta move again

All three: Yeah

Sion: You gotta find a new place

Anita: Yeah

George: Cause you're like well this is a perfect spot for me, all nice and quiet we'll stay here and we can like talk and whatever and then suddenly the next thing you know there's someone there so then you gotta, like you said find another place again (Group interview with Anita, Rachel, George, 24th March 2015)

George's articulation of the spatial instability that the children are dealing with is particularly eloquent. When he says 'it's because it's your I dunno it's not yours but you feel like it's your place to sit and your thing' he is articulating the sense of ownership and familiarity that the children are trying to establish over specific spaces or even specific areas in specific spaces. This harks back to Tamboukou and Ball's description of children "struggling to win some space" for themselves' (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 258) in school environments, and George articulates the difficulty that the children feel when the space that they have claimed is disrupted: 'Cause you're like well this is a perfect spot for me, all nice and quiet we'll stay here and we can like talk and whatever and then suddenly the next thing you know there's someone there so then you gotta, like you said find another place again'. This last line '*find another place again*' is what I am attempting to articulate with the idea that the children are involved in 'nomadic negotiations of space'. The inevitability and regularity of the 'again' in George's statement is what is telling; it is not simply that they have to find another space, but that they have to do it again, and again, and again, and the threat of always having to move again is always present. The finding and claiming of such spaces echoes the theorisations of Massumi (2002) on affect, where spatial experiences and orientation is articulated via the language of affect: these are embodied, sensory experiences,

where the children perhaps sense ‘the shape of space’ and the ways in which at particular times they use these sensory experiences of space to enact their *spatial negotiations*. These sensory experiences are entangled with enactments and performances of gender, as shown in this section and the section below. The ways in which the girls who participated in the research enacted different kinds of girlhood were entwined with their experiences of space and their spatial negotiations. It appears for the pupils of Valley School that space and gender are always in “the process of being made” (Massey, 2005: 9). It is “never finished; never closed” (Massey, 2005: 9). Space is political, it is gendered, it is sensory, it is material, for the children of Valley School. The interview extracts above go a small way to telling the stories of these pupils *spatial negotiations* and “simultaneity of stories-so-far” (Massey, 2005:9).

5.3 Boys Experiences of School and Local Spaces

In terms of the boys’ experiences of space, I will draw from the group interviews I conducted with Matt, Drew and Phil as well as my broader observations of the boys in the classroom. The three boys mentioned here were some of the most enthusiastic early participants in the research, and all three of them occupied a kind of middle ground when it came to masculinity - they were all engaged in sports, and occupied spaces that allowed them to play sport, yet none of them were amongst the most overtly masculine, aggressive, or disobedient boys in the class. Indeed, Phil, despite being an avid rugby player, talked frequently about harrowing experiences of bullying in his previous school and locality. When discussing the idea of *spatial negotiations* in relation to Phil, I will use interview data to expand the concept of *spatial negotiations* to take in local and regional spaces/places. This allows a glimpse into the *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in beyond the school gates, and how universal spaces (such as a football pitch, or a school) can change depending on local contexts. I would have liked to have expanded the fieldwork into the locality and understand how the children experience local spaces in combination with school spaces. However, as detailed in Chapter 3, conducting research in the school itself was met with so many challenges that this kind of expansion of the research’s scope was not possible. This could potentially be an avenue for future explorations of children’s experiences of space in South Wales (and indeed, has already been explored in Renold and Ivinson’s work in the South Wales valleys; see Renold and Ivinson, 2013; Ivinson and Renold, 2014).

When considering the boys’ gendered experiences of space in the school, I will also draw on the literature and research into masculinities in the school set out in the literature review. The idea that these boys are undergoing a complex negotiation of masculine archetypes (Frosh *et al*, 2003) with few clear acceptable or attainable models of masculinity available to them. The way in which Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman define enactments of masculinity ‘as gendered practices which

are relational, contradictory and multiple,' (Frosh *et al*, 2003: 84-85) will serve as a crucial underpinning to this discussion of masculinities in Valley School.

The sports pitch is one of the key spaces in the boys' school life, whether they spend time on it or not. In a similar way to the 'outside/inside' divide between the girls, I got the sense that most boys felt some pressure to spend time on the football and rugby pitches. Indeed, there weren't any boys I came across who actively professed to dislike spending time outside on the sports pitches, a fact that is perhaps surprising. There would appear to be a rather bounded sense of what spaces should and could be occupied by boys, again lending weight to the argument that spaces are often highly gendered. The sports pitch is also a space that has 'universality', i.e. it is a space that exists outside of school, in the local community and beyond. It is therefore interesting to consider the boys' experiences of the sports pitch in conjunction with the idea of the school's *unruly atmosphere*, for the sports pitch is where unruliness and physicality is encouraged and expected (within the given rules of the specific sports being played). To what extent does the particular kind of masculinity found in this school and region inform the schools' specific *unruly atmosphere* and vice versa? The boys' experiences of physicality, aggression and unruliness all to some extent link up with the girls' experiences of unruliness explored in the previous section, as well as with the unruly physicality on display 'in-between' (Clark, 2010) spaces such as the corridors, to be discussed in the next section. However, the unruliness experienced on the sports pitch is framed within the supposed legitimacy of the activity of sport (primarily football and rugby). Phil alludes to this in the group interview I conducted with him, Matt and Drew:

Sion: And what about you Phil? What do you like, rugby?

Phil: I just like running into people.

Sion: (Laughs) Yeah...cos rugby is like quite rough and tumble isn't it, it's got, like in comparison to football, I know football you can still get injured and stuff like that but rugby – is that, you like that about rugby that it's, it's quite sort of physical I suppose?

Phil: Mmm

Sion: Yeah? Cause you were saying you got an injury or something, recently, when I seen you – what happened with that?

Phil: Which one, the one in my neck or-

Sion: How many have you had?

Phil: (Laughs) Too many to count. (Group Interview from 28th April, 2015 with Phil, Matt and Drew)

Phil's continuing propensity to get injured was a kind of running joke between him, me, Matt and Drew. Phil had mentioned his injuries on numerous occasions to me, and it felt to me as if they were a kind of badge of honour that he wanted to display to me and others. It felt as if he were presenting himself as someone who could endure physical punishment and pain. Phil was a stocky boy, but had experienced bullying in his previous school and locality (which I will explore later) and it seemed to me that he was attempting to present himself in a consciously different way in this school by frequently discussing his love of rugby and his propensity for endurance and injury. Nevertheless, it is clear that in terms of the sports pitch, Phil experienced this space as a space where physical aggression and unruliness were to be expected.

Matt develops the theme of physical injury and sport further in the same group interview:

Sion: Yeah so you get injured a fair bit like? D'you mind that, does it bother you, no? Alright.

Matt: Get used to it after a while I guess.

Sion: Yeah, d'you find that with football as well guys? Like sometimes you get an injury or something?

Matt: Sometimes, like if you've been playing for quite a while and like cause you wear studs in football, in rugby as well I meant, and um, sometimes people stand on you, like you could come up against a team that's like really rough as well, in football, and they tend to like injure people a lot as well

Sion: You feel like some teams will go out to try and do that?

Matt: Yeah (Group interview from 28th April, 2015 with Matt, Drew and Phil).

Matt's assertion that you 'get used to it (injury) after a while I guess' chimes with Phil's jokes about having had 'too many injuries to count' whilst playing rugby. The boys are used to spending time on the space of the sports pitch, and have normalised (to some degree) the physical unruliness and aggression that can occur there. In terms of the sports pitches in the school, these were dominated by boys at break times and lunchtimes, though as noted earlier some of the girls liked to spend time around the sports pitches too (though they seemed unable to assert ownership of these spaces in the ways that the boys could).

The intersection between the bounded space of the sports pitch and aggressive masculinity is particularly prominent in this region of Wales (Ward, 2013), with sport providing a traditional avenue for recreation and masculinity. What was interesting from this group interview with Matt, Drew and Phil was the way they discussed the space of the sports pitch and the activity of sport *outside* the school, in their locality. Indeed, they made a distinction between the kinds of

aggression that can go on in organised sporting events outside school, sports inside school and more 'casual' sports play at break times. They discuss how 'organised sports' in the locality have at times led to violent incidents:

Sion: Yeah, maybe, ok. Cause part of what I'm interested in with the research is like kind of how kids deal with like toughness, physicality, violence and things like that? And like obviously in sport, it's not the same as fighting is it, because it's all arranged-

Matt: Yeah, but there has been fights in football before

Sion: Yeah?

Matt: Like, with like I remember when I played for my local team, it's quite a while ago, um-

Drew: Two of the coaches wasn't it

Matt: Yeah, two of the coaches had a fight and-

Sion: the actual coaches themselves?

Matt: Yeah

Sion: The adults!

Matt: Yeah, cos uh one of them forgot to bring his boots or something-

Drew: No it wasn't a coach is was one coach and a dad wasn't it?

Matt: Yeah, and there's been like the actual football players had a fight as well at the end of the match for like fouling and stuff

Sion: Ok, so sometimes like the game-

Matt: There's like disagreements and stuff

Sion: Yeah cos I play football a bit myself, so like the game can be like rough and tumble, like maybe the game would be a bit tough, but it's all in the game, and then at some point it might spill out, sometimes it becomes like-

Matt: Yeah, it's quite rare though for that to happen (Group interview from 28th April 2015 with Matt, Drew and Phil)

Here, Matt and Drew give an account of a fight that occurred in the space of sport pitch but in the locality, not in the school. Notably, the fight was between to adults rather than children. There are elements of reactivity in their responses, as I invited the topic and response, and the children

are obviously referencing a 'spectacular' incident which was probably exceptional in its occurrence. However, it does seem to indicate the underlying aggression present in football and rugby, and the related connotations for masculinity. The boys also discuss how there has sometimes been fights between players at the end of games. Clearly, the sports pitch in the locality and the sports pitch as a kind of 'travelling' space can be less or more unruly and violent depending on the temporal and organisational contexts it is placed in. Matt and Drew discuss the differences to playing in an organised match to playing casually with their friends in school:

Sion: Yeah, like they react back. Ok, ok. And then, do you guys like play football in like your lunchbreaks and stuff like that in the school?

Matt: Yeah, like my friends play, like after this we're probably gonna go play football on the pitch

Drew: I think they're on there now

Matt: They're on the grass

Sion: And like when it's like a casual game like that, when it's just in break times and stuff-

Matt: Yeah we sometimes have a laugh in football as well, like, everyone's laughing

Sion: It's like more fun

Matt: There's not – we've never had a fight inside of school over a football game

Sion: Ah so it's more like the arranged, when it's like an organised team thing-

Matt: When it's like a proper like match

Sion: Do you think that's maybe cos there's like a bit more pressure on it when it's like a match?

Matt: Yeah it's more competitive then

Sion: Whereas like-

Matt: They're all your friends (Extract from group interview with Matt Drew and Phil, 28th April 2015)

Here, we see the ways in which Matt and Drew distinguish between the space of the sports pitch and what happens on it in different contexts and places. The space of the sports pitch exists in multiple places for these boys, and its context in place and time means has different connotations. In the context of the extract above, where Matt discusses the difference between playing an 'organised match' which is more competitive and a casual match with friends in the school playground, the school space actually comes off as a less dangerous, safer space than the

local sports pitch in a competitive masculine environment. This was one of the few times where some of the children discussed preferring certain school spaces and activities to spaces in the wider locality.

The complex and varied ways these boys (and others) seemed to experience the specific space of the sports pitch, in Valley School and beyond, points to Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman's assertion that the performance and enactment of masculinities in schools can be seen as 'as gendered practices which are relational, contradictory and multiple,' (Frosh *et al*, 2003: 84-85). The boys do not just *like* or *dislike* the space of the sports pitch (and the masculinities performed through it) but they have complex and multiplicitous feelings about this one space depending on time, location, environment, context, relations to other human bodies in the space, and so on. This is just one space where the complexity of their relational masculinities is experienced. In a similar way to the girls in section 5.2, they are experiencing space and gender as entangled and never-finished stories, in a sensory and embodied fashion. The physicality and aggression witnessed and experienced in this space (and others) could be viewed through Skeggs notion that male violence is seen as 'a legitimisation and articulation of power and domination' (Skeggs, 1993 in Mac an Ghaill, 1994: 55). However, it was not the boys interviewed that were using these problematic practices to exercise dominant masculinity. Instead, they were witnessing and critiquing these displays (particularly the displays of adult men).

These extracts seem to point to the ways in which *spatial negotiations* are going on *beyond* the school, and the ways in which certain spaces can be seen as unsafe or dangerous in the locality and region beyond the school. These matters became particularly apparent in the interview I conducted with Phil, where he discussed the ways in which his previous locality and school were spaces that caused him to feel unsafe and where he fell victim to violence on a number of occasions. He first recounted these kinds of stories to me when the research began, as this extract from my field notes shows:

I sit in PSE which is on internet safety. I sit next to a group of boys. Phil, who has handed in a consent form for the research, tells me that he has been bullied at his old school in Quarry Town. He tells me that he was once assaulted on a bus in Quarry Town by a 15 year old girl. His friend Jonathan laughs. Phil laughs too, slightly nervously. He tells me that this 15 year old girl punched him repeatedly in the side of the head on this bus. He says that he didn't know whether to hit her back as she was a girl. He also says he couldn't be bothered. His friend says it doesn't matter that she was a girl as it would have been self-defence. Two of the other sitting next to him laugh slightly while he tells this story. He seems aware of this but not concerned.

Phil also tells me that he moved from a 1000 pupil school to Valley School, which is much smaller, and that he was bullied in his old school all the time' (Field notes extract, 24th February 2015).

Phil had seemed to have problems in his previous school (a so-called super school, usually a merger between a number of smaller rural schools) which then spilled out into his locality. The assault he suffered on the bus was in part related to the bullying that he suffered in his old school. He expands on this in the group interview:

Sion: What about you Phil do you like living in Valley Town?

Phil: Yeah it's better than living in Quarry Town

Sion: What was it like there?

Phil: Like, cos of like my story like when I was in my primary

Sion: I remember you mentioned it yeah

Phil: Yeah, it was like scarier to go out and that

Sion: Really? So maybe it was a bit rough there?

Phil: Yeah

Matt: You feel more safe in-

Phil: Yeah, I feel safer here, cause like, it's like a new, no-one from Quarry town and that are down here, like a fresh start

Sion: So what was it that was unsafe about where you were living, what was it that was like-

Phil: No it's just like I was always like a target

Sion: Oh right ok. Is that for like, like at the school or is that – we don't have to talk about it if you don't want to, I'm just curious - is that like is that in the local area?

Phil: In school, um outside my house (Group interview from 28th April 2015 extract with Phil, Matt and Drew)

Here, Phil follows up his previous tales of bullying and violence in the group interview setting. He notes how it was 'scarier to go out' in his old locality. He notes how he was 'a target' for violence and bullying both inside and outside of school. Space and place, then, is very important for Phil,

not only in the context of specific spaces in Valley School (such as the rugby pitch) but also in the context of larger local and regional spaces and places.

What part does gender play in these negotiations of space, both institutionally and locally? Phil's experiences speak of a slightly fractured gender identity (again referring back to Frosh *et al's* (2003) contradictory and multiplicitous masculinities), and I got the sense that he had taken up rugby with enthusiasm in Valley School so as to protect against bullying in this new school. From being a target for bullies in his previous locality and school, he felt safer and seemed to engage with friends more frequently in Valley School than in his stories about Quarry Town and Quarry School. As I have suggested, Phil seemed to take pride in his rugby 'war stories', and seemed to understand that the ability to take and give out physical punishment ('I just like running into people') was a desirable masculine trait. Nevertheless, he did not completely fit into the exalted heterosexual masculine ideal (Renold, 2005) – he wore very thick glasses, was occasionally the butt of jokes in class, and was comfortable around girls as much as boys. Becky notes this in the individual interview I conducted with her:

Becky: Yeah to be honest Phil is one of the girls to be honest we all call him a girl because he's just like one of the girls, he doesn't like bothering with the boys much he just bothers with the girls so we call him a girl

Sion: (Laughs) ok so he's comfortable with it' (Extract from individual interview with Becky, 24th March 2015).

Becky asserts here that Phil 'doesn't like bothering with the boys much' (bothering meaning to spend time with) he 'just bothers with the girls'. Indeed, outside of sporting situations Phil was often to be found with groups of girls rather than the boys. He seemed to have no fixed friendship groups or pairs (though he was fairly close to Matt and Drew) and seemed to occupy ambiguous position in the school's gendered order. Phil would be just as comfortable in the inside space of the music room, with its feminine gendered connotations, as much as he would be on the outside space of the rugby pitch, running into other boys. As that suggests, Phil's ambiguous position in the school's gender order, was inextricably bound up with its ordering of space. Again, *spatial negotiations* provide a useful prism through which to understand his gendered experiences, masculinity and subjectivity within Valley School and beyond.

How do the boys' experiences of space, in the school and locality help develop the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space'? We can see that spaces are unstable. They are 'never finished' as Massey (2005) would say. They are sensory and affective experiences (Masumi, 2002), containing emotions perhaps not articulated but implied. Phil's experiences in his previous school and locality were clearly distressing for him, and perhaps impacted on his family's decision

to move to a different location. Phil has very little control over what spaces and places he spends his time in, and what might occur there. However, his experience of Valley School being safer than his experiences in Quarry Town and Quarry School offers an interesting counterpoint to the general picture painted of Valley School so far: for all its faults and unruliness, it is a small, semi-rural school which whilst chaotic is not (in Phil's experience at least) violent and unsafe.

Similarly, Matt and Drew's experiences of the space of the sport pitch favour the pitch in school to those experienced in the locality and region (or in more organised, competitive contexts in both places). This space (the sports pitch) could perhaps be described as a 'portable' space - one that exists, in its specific bounded and material-discursive context, in a variety of different spaces and places and in local, regional, national and global culture. The sports pitch was a space that these boys (and many others in the class) spent time in, yet it had a variety of different contexts and atmospheres. Matt and Drew describe how when they play football in a casual way, at break times and lunchtimes with their friends in the school, it is a place where there isn't any fighting or danger and where they can have fun. This is in contrast to experiences they have had in the space of the sports pitch in different places and contexts, particularly in their locality playing organised football for a local team. In this space, a particularly aggressive hyper masculinity could be found, one in which, adult men might fight each other over a missing pair of boots, or whole teams might engage in brawls at the end of the game. Though these examples were likely 'spectacular' anecdotes supplied by these interviewees, the gendered component to the space of sports pitch is obvious but worth referring to. As these boys implied, aggressive masculinity and the ability to endure physical punishment were linked to the space and activity of the sports pitch.

In some ways the boys in this class and their *spatial negotiations* were less 'nomadic' than the overall experiences of the girls. This was because they implicitly had authority over the vast outside spaces of the football and rugby pitches. That is not to say, however, that all boys wanted to play football and rugby and that all boys were comfortable spending time in these spaces. What it does mean, however, is that if the boys *were* comfortable within these spaces then they had a space which they could (to some degree, and in the context of competitive masculinity) claim as their own. The girls had no such 'legitimate' space, and therefore their *spatial negotiations* were more 'nomadic', veering (broadly) between the fringes of the sports pitches or the vagaries of teachers who allowed them to spend time in their classes during breaks (such as the music room). What we can see throughout the above sections is the interplay between gender and space in Valley School, and the ways in which *spatial negotiations* inform, and are informed by, the students' gendered subjectivities and identities.

Thus far I focused mainly on the spaces that children spend time in during break times and lunchbreaks. The final analysis chapter will look at the ways in which *spatial negotiations* and the *unruly atmosphere* are present in the classroom, and the way this space is ordered and disrupted by pupils and teachers. Before that, however, I want to investigate the ‘in between’ spaces of the school: those spaces that serve as thoroughfares and walkways between classes, specifically the corridors. Though on first appearance these spaces may seem inert and unworthy of analysis, they actually play a very important part in the children’s ‘nomadic negotiations of space’, and serve as pressure points for the eruption of the school’s *unruly atmosphere*.

5.4 Unruly Spaces: The ‘In-Between’ Spaces of the Corridors

Clark (2010) discusses the importance of the material, spatial context of schools in her paper on ‘in-between’ school spaces from 2010. She explicates a division between “teaching” and “non-teaching” spaces, and suggests that “these non-teaching spaces can be seen to be ‘in-between’, neither classroom nor playground, and as such may be part of the hidden face of the school” (Clark, 2010, 768). This idea that the “in-between” spaces of a school may be part of its ‘hidden face’ echoed very much with my experiences of the corridors in the school, and the ways in which they contributed to the manifestation of the *unruly atmosphere* of the school, which may well be part of the school’s ‘hidden face’ or informal culture. The specific space of the corridor, and the idea that there are “corridor cultures” (Hurdley, 2010) are examined in the literature review, and will be brought to bear specifically in this section of the analysis. Hurdley suggests that “corridors matter. Too often invoked as iconic, intangible metaphors, the presence of corridors as cultural materials can be forgotten” (2010: 45). In particular, I will draw on Hurdley’s suggestion that by focusing on practices that go on in corridors, one can attend to “material, spatialised, contingent practices that slide away unseen and unheard beneath the buzzing repetition of metaphor, icon and cliché” (2010: 46). This suggestion is certainly borne out in the corridors of Valley School, where regular “material, spatialised” practices were occurring on a daily and in fact hourly basis. These practices certainly seemed to “slide away unseen” (2010) by everyone except the children. The corridors and what occurred through them provide a window in to the relational, multitudinous and material ways in which specific school spaces were experienced (in an affective and sensory way) via the *unruly atmosphere* of the school. I will now present an extended ethnographic observation from my field notes on one of the extreme instances of this unruliness playing out in the “in-between” space of the corridors:

I arrive early, Mrs Jones isn’t here. This strikes me as odd as she is normally in her classroom prior to the children arriving. The class room is empty, and it feels strange being on my own in class. I can hear chairs scraping above me, and I know exams taking place in the rooms adjacent. Signs saying ‘quiet please’ in capital letters are everywhere. Noise seems to be a school wide issue that

needs to be dealt with constantly. I hear teachers' adjacent going 'shhh'. It's cold, its silent, the space is unoccupied. A teacher shouts 'what are you doing? BEHAVE! YOU'RE IN YEAR 11!'

I anticipate how the teachers and children will disrupt the quietness in minutes. The contrast between this atmosphere and what's coming seems extreme – this quietness versus the chaos that will ensure.

Reflect on how my teenage subjectivity just wants to leave the school, the part that is 15 years old, the part that doesn't have to be there. My self is constantly split here.

Year 11 leaves the room adjacent shouting inaudible words. Noises come and go from above me and the hallway.

I hear the kids arriving outside in the hallway. They shout and scream, and push against the wall of the class. I am sat on the other side, and the wall literally bulges and moves as their bodies smash and bang against it. As time moves past the allocated class start time, I sense that the chaos of the group gets more intense. As institutional order breaks down, so the intensity of the children's unruliness increases. I have a sense of anxiety as no teacher has arrived yet. Again I may be the de facto teacher, the de facto authority figure, as in one of my first times with the PSE class.

I go out into the hallway with trepidation - the class is there, and the noise is incredible. Bodies moving, pushing, shoving, screaming, shouting. This aggression is intense, yet at the same time undirected, uncontrolled. It is not the intentional, malicious intention of one child deliberately hitting another. It is more like a force has been unleashed, due to the space the children occupy and the fact that class hasn't started and the teacher isn't present. The kids at the front (Jonathan, Phil) are obviously trying to stay away from this noise. Jonathan is small in stature and later says in an interview that he dislikes the pushing and shoving in the hallways between classes. It occurs to me that unruliness here is linked to space and time. The in-between areas and times allow for chaotic body movements.' (Field Notes Extract, 27th April 2015)

Although this is an extreme example of the unruliness I witnessed taking place in the corridors, it was not wholly removed from the kind of unruliness present every day. To give a little background to the reader, I noticed the unruliness that occurred in the corridors when travelling between classes almost immediately upon starting my ethnographic fieldwork in the school. Indeed, in the first instances of my classroom observations, when I followed the children from class to class across most of a school day, the children would be acting as guides for me, and the hustle and bustle and crush of bodies in between classes was powerful and palpable. It induced a new kind of spatial negotiation - the negotiation of bodies in the "in-between" spaces of the corridors. It was temporally specific, when I walked through the corridors *during* lessons, or with

the children on walking tours when classes were taking place, the corridors were peaceful, empty, quiet spaces. The five minutes that the children have to get from one class to another assists in creating a temporally specific negotiation of the *unruly atmosphere* in the “in between” spaces of the corridors. The nature of this negotiation, this walking from class to class, could range from good-natured hubbub to chaotic, almost dangerous physicality, but regardless of its quality, the sheer amount of sudden material *action* was extremely noticeable. This is the “material context” (Lawn, 2005 in Clark, 2010) of the school, present in the non-teaching spaces, that to some extent may not have been emphasised in previous school research studies (Lawn, 2005 in Clark, 2010). Lawn suggests that in relegating the material context of the school to the background, we may miss the ways in which this materiality is “linked into heterogeneous active networks in which people, objects and routines are closely connected” (Lawn, 2005 in Clark, 2010: 767).

This unruliness was physical, material, sensory. It helped define the “shape of space” (Massumi, 2002) of the corridors at specific temporal junctures. The extract above shines a light on the “corridor culture(s)” (Hurdley, 2010: 60) of Valley School, and shows the ways in which embodied movements were entangled with the space of the corridors during the times between classes. Hurdley’s metaphorical assertion that corridors are spaces where “the organisation is therefore always ‘in extension’, as bodies are enlarged or diminished, pushed through the centre or pressed to the side-lines (Strathern, 1991)” (2010: 59) becomes *literal* in Valley School. The bodies of the children are literally pushed, pulled and pressed against the side-lines.

This chaotic unruliness that occurred in the corridors is a temporally specific routinized example of this often overlooked “material context” of school life, and is particularly apparent in the extended extract presented above. The children approach as a material force, and the first element of the material context is the noise, the noise of their loud voices getting louder and louder, as they shout and scream at each other. This noise is quite ironic given the exams taking place and the ‘quiet please’ signs that are covering the corridors. Indeed, the controlling of noise as a disruptive force is something I will discuss further in Chapter 6, as it plays a vital part in teaching, ordering and disciplining the children. In any case, the noise they make is the introduction to the materiality of the unruliness that occurs in the corridors.

Next comes the physical aspect - the crashing and smashing of their bodies against the wall of the class. This is a particularly vivid ethnographic memory for me, as I was literally sat with my back against this dividing wall, and when the children’s bodies began to smash against it, it bulged and moved against my back. Such was the force of the unruliness playing out in the corridor that it had a physical impact on my body, and the very structure of the school.

The other thing to consider in this particular extract was the way in which this unruliness escalated beyond what could be considered 'normal'. The routine during my observations of this class (Welsh) would typically be that I would arrive at 1400, with the lesson due to start at 1405. Mrs Jones would be there, usually alone, as she had a free period prior to this class. I would take my seat at the front of the room, with my back to the wall so I could see the class, and wait for the students to arrive, while chatting with her.

When the students arrived they would typically have to line up outside the class and wait until Mrs Jones came outside and gave them permission to enter. The period prior to Mrs Jones going outside would often be the most unruly: I have been on both sides of that wall, and the children's physical unruliness seems to increase almost in anticipation of the authority figure of the teacher, and the inherent discipline that came with her arrival. However, what is interesting about the above extract is that Mrs Jones was not present on that day, and that seemed to contribute to an increase in the unruliness that is occurring in the corridor.

It is clear from the extract that I was feeling anxious about Mrs Jones absence, as I was worried about becoming the de-facto authority figure, which may have disrupted the rapport I had built with the class, and was not a role I feel comfortable inhabiting. This anxiety at the teacher's absence may have also been felt by the children; perhaps their reaction to this anxiety or confusion was to act out more, to exploit the opportunity to play the role of 'out of control' children. Whatever their motivation, the group's unruly and chaotic behaviour becomes more intense as the minutes tick beyond the allotted class time, and when I step out into the corridor it is clear that not all of the children are enjoying this breakdown in the school order. Jonathan and Phil have moved to the front of the line, near the classroom door, and look visibly relieved when I appear.

This again points to the ways in which institutional factors and breakdowns in institutional organisation can have a trickle-down effect on the children's daily lives and behaviours. I am not being critical of Mrs Jones for being absent, as sickness can happen to anyone, but rather the school's inability to provide a suitable cover teacher in time for the start of the class (unfortunately, failures of this kind were far from unusual). This confusion as to what is 'supposed' to happen increases the already present unruliness that occurs in the specific temporal and spatial context of the corridors when moving between classes, and may have been stressful for some of the children. The 'shape' of the corridor space (Massumi, 2002) changed the longer it took for a teacher or adult to appear. We can see how their 'nomadic negotiations of space' are present in these "in-between" spaces of the school, because of the way they are moved around, almost tribe-like, at the behest of an institutional order and authority that may or may not break down at any moment. The prevalence of the *unruly atmosphere* in the school is not only present

in the children's physical behaviours, but also in the school institutional disorganisation and macro-instability. The absence of a covering teacher may have been an administrative oversight, or may have been a budget problem, or perhaps an example of a workforce stretched to breaking point. Though I do not know the specific reason in this instance, we can see how the macro pressures and disruptions placed on the school trickle down and affect the children's nomadic negotiations of space, exacerbating and intensifying the typical 'unruliness' that may exist in any secondary school. This links to the ways in the macro institutional and political contexts of Valley School influenced the micro-practices and daily lives of the children in the school.

I discussed this unruliness in the corridors in some of the interviews I undertook with the children. The following extract is from my individual interview with Jonathan:

Sion: And then in terms of like when you're going about your day, like when you're between classes, going from one class to another, you gotta wait outside and all that, how do you find that?

Jonathan: Uh, annoying sometimes

Sion: Why's that?

Jonathan: Well, well when we have to line up in corridors they're always barging and fighting, well not fighting but they're always – getting on my nerves mostly

Sion: Yeah, so like it gets a bit rough is it or?

Jonathan: Yeah

Sion: Yeah I noticed that a couple of times, uh, would that mainly be boys, or is it generally a bit of both

Jonathan: Bit of both

Sion: Yeah? Is there much you can do about it, or?

Jonathan: No (Laughs) just go with it like (Extract from individual interview with Jonathan, 12th May 2015)

Jonathan discusses how the unruliness in the corridors is annoying, and has difficulty naming exactly what it is that occurs there. He says that when they line up '*they're always barging and fighting*' and then corrects himself, saying '*well, not fighting*'. This particular line is of interest as it shines a light on the ways in which these routinized occurrences of physical unruliness in the corridors may be part of the aforementioned 'hidden face' of the school. This is evident

particularly when thought of in a material and spatial context, because Jonathan cannot accurately name what happens in the corridors. This points to the nebulous quality of the phenomenon itself – a bit intimidating, a bit too rough, a bit out of control – and to its ambiguous position in the life of the school, something real but happening just beneath the surface. This line was also crucial in the shift in focus of this thesis, from violence to space - I realised that Jonathan's difficulty in naming the unruliness in the corridors reflected my own discomfort with naming the unruliness as violence. Unruliness, in this context and definition, can potentially spill over into violence, but it is not the same as violence semantically or conceptually. It is not as extreme, dangerous or deliberate. I am defining unruliness in this thesis as a kind of all pervasive 'atmosphere', a material force that lays dormant or erupts in specific temporal and spatial contexts. This will be tracked further in the final analysis chapter, which looks at the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* manifests in the final unexplored space of the school: the classroom.

For now, I will continue the discussion of the "in-between" spaces of the corridors, and the ways in which they give us insights into the further negotiations of space that the children are involved in. If we think back to the way in which many of the previous interviews, particularly with female participants, focused on avoiding cramped or crowded spaces, we might wonder how the periods travelling between classes were experienced by the children concerned. Anita, who sought to avoid the crush of the bodies in the foyer, or Becky, who hated being outside because of the potential for fighting, would be forced, every hour, to undergo a routinized spatial negotiation that was highly likely to result in exactly the kinds of conditions that they sought to avoid. This would add to the already complex set of 'nomadic negotiations of space' that they have to consider throughout the school day, though this time, the consideration would not be *where* they would go, but *how* to get there with the least amount of trouble.

Tracy and Sarah discuss the challenges of the corridor spaces in this extract:

Sion: ok, so like yeah cos I noticed that like going from class to class like the difference like when you're just waiting around and especially if you've gotta wait for a while, it can get a bit, maybe it gets a bit rough or like it gets a bit loud or whatever, like is that, does that, do you find that or-

Tracy: Yeah

Sarah: Yeah everyone starts to shout cos there's no teachers there

Tracy: It's alright like sometimes, but then people, like one person will start talking then it'll end up a lot of people

Sion: Ok, I guess it's difficult, it's difficult though isn't it, cause like you have to be quiet in class, so kind of like when you've got a little bit of time maybe you want to have a chat or whatever, but then, I wondered about like when it gets a bit – when there's pushing and shoving, is that, cause you were saying that happens sometimes

Sarah: Yeah, mostly when you're waiting to go into history cause it's like the main corridor that everyone's gotta walk through

Tracy: Small corridor as well

Sion: That's like by the toilets as well, isn't it down by there

Both: Yeah

Sion: So does that bother you?

Tracy: No

Sarah: No not really, we're used to it (Laughs)

Tracy: Only if you get pushed on the floor

Sion: Ok, but other than that you don't mind

Tracy: No

Sion: You give as good as you get like?

Tracy: Yeah (Extract from group interview with Tracy and Sarah, 18th May 2015)

There is an element of reactivity and co-construction going on here, as my question seems to actively invite responses that focus on physicality and 'pushing and shoving'. However, this issue was something the girls alluded to earlier, and therefore cannot only be attributed to my bringing it up. I am careful to consider reactivity issues during these analysis chapters, so as to not over-interpret the data, whilst understanding how much of it is true to the pupils' social worlds.

There are some interesting observations here on the nature of negotiating the corridors. Sarah suggests that the noise and unruliness increases in the corridors because '*there's no teachers there*'. They also discuss how the main thoroughfare near the toilets and the history class is a '*small corridor*' and how this is often where the unruly activity occurs. Both girls state that it does not bother them and that '*they're used to it*' though Tracy adds, slightly worryingly, that it only bothers her if '*you get pushed on the floor*'. The way in which both girls glibly discuss this unruliness, as if it is a regular and inevitable occurrence, gives some insight into the experiences

that students in Valley School are having in specific spatial and temporal contexts. Being '*pushed on the floor*' is the extreme end of unruliness, and one where definitions of violence and unruliness may overlap. It is almost as if, in the specific temporal context of the travelling between classes, in the specific spatial context of the 'in-between' spaces of the corridors, the *unruly atmosphere* becomes a physical force. This physical force is enacted by all of the elements of the school, including the pupils, and this physical force must be negotiated, avoided, accepted, or created by the pupils. However they choose to deal with it, they *have* to deal with it, six or seven times a day, five days a week, for five years. When presented in this way, one gains an insight into what this spatial negotiation may be like for them.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to illustrate and broaden out the *spatial negotiations* that the children in Valley School are experiencing. It has done this by considering the ways in which social components of identity and subjectivity, specifically gender, may play a part in the ways in which the female participants negotiate space. By illustrating the contrasting attitudes that different girls have towards space and gender, I have attempted to illustrate the ways in which their 'nomadic negotiations of space' have a gendered component. This allows us to gain further insight into the complexity of the children's negotiations of space, and the ways in which certain spaces along the 'inside' and 'outside' spectrum have certain connotations to certain groups of girls. This was particularly illustrated in the ways in which some of the girls I interviewed had a disdain or a dislike for occupying inside spaces during lunch times, particularly the toilets and the music room, and the ways in which other girls (such as Rachel) enjoyed spending time in the music room and felt a sense of community there. I attempted to link these attitudes to literature on conceptualisations of embodied femininity and movement in the school environment, particularly the concept of the "passive schoolgirl" (Stanley, 1986), and illustrate the ways in which certain girls moved towards or away from this particular subjective archetype. In illustrating the gendered component of the girls 'nomadic negotiations of space' we are able to gain further insight into the multifaceted, iterative process of negotiations that the girls in Valley School are involved in. During this section, I referred back to the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis: Massey's propositions on space (Massey, 2005) as well as Paecther's (2010) work on tomboys, femininities and space and gender.

The next part of this chapter then looks at the ways that boys experienced space, primarily focusing on the experiences of Matt, Drew and Phil and their interactions with the space of the sports pitch (primarily football and rugby) in Valley School and the surrounding locality and region. Here we saw how gender and space were entangled, the ways in which the boys expected typical masculine activities of sport and aggression in these spaces, how they had an ambiguous

relationship with these activities and experiences, and how this 'portable' space of the sports pitch could have different connotations within different contexts and places.

We also saw the ways in which Phil had experience negotiations of space on a larger scale, having had traumatic experiences in the places and spaces of his previous school and locality in Quarry Town. Consider Phil's experiences in the context of regional merging of schools, prolific school closures in South Wales and the impending closure of Valley School. His experiences give an insight into the education policy in this region and the impact they can have on individual students, particularly when viewing those experiences through *spatial negotiations*. This section drew on the literature regarding masculinities, and showed the ways in which these boys were perhaps involved in "gendered practices which are relational, contradictory and multiple" (Frosh *et al*, 2003: 84-85).

The second part of this chapter considered the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school was particularly prevalent in the "in-between" (Clark, 2010) spaces of the school corridors, in a specific temporal context (the time between classes). It also drew on Hurdley (2010) and her ethnographic research into the ways in which corridors provide insight into "material, spatialised, contingent practices that slide away unseen and unheard beneath the buzzing repetition of metaphor, icon and cliché" (Hurdley, 2010: 46). The ways in which the children's journeys through the corridors were dependent and contingent on the 'distinct trajectories' (Massey, 2005) of other human bodies is summed up neatly by Hurdley when she notes that "as one person sets out on a particular route in this compendium of connections, she also cues a series of possibilities through walking, contingent always upon whom she might encounter on (or in) her way (Law, 1994; Thrift, 2006)." (2010: 46) This statement again becomes *literally* true for the children of Valley School – who will be encountered in these spaces during the transition from class to class, and who might get in a student's way? We can see from the extracts from Jonathan, Tracy and Sarah that people frequently 'got in the way' in a very literal, physical sense, and this shows the way in which the specific spaces of the corridors, perhaps seen as common-sense thoroughfares by the institution, were in fact indicative of a specific, spatialized, embodied material culture within Valley School.

The third and final analysis chapter will look at the last unexplored space of the school – the classroom, and will analyse the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school is dealt with, and created by, the students and teaching staff alike. The impact that institutional disorganisation and pressures had on this unruliness will be felt most keenly in this chapter, and I will attempt to illustrate the ways in which my own attempts to find space to conduct research in the school mirrored the children's 'nomadic negotiations of space'.

Chapter 6: The *Unruly Atmosphere* and the Classroom Space

6.1 Introduction

This final analysis chapter will seek to bring together some of the themes that have been developed in the previous chapters, and will move into the space that has been missing from the analysis thus far: the classroom. Though I do discuss the music room in previous chapters, this is in the context of break and lunch times. We have not yet entered the classroom space when teaching and learning is occurring. As such, the chapter seeks to complete the spatial journey around the school begun in Chapter 4, one that has led us from the larger, wider expanse of the outside and inside school spaces, through the corridors at the end of the previous chapter, and finally into the classroom space. The *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in here are different than in the previous chapters - they have far less choice as to *what* space they occupy, and are far more controlled in that space than they are in the spaces they occupy during break and lunchtimes. The crucial point in this chapter is *how* they inhabit the classroom space - the spatial negotiation here is behavioural. Therefore, this chapter will analyse the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* present in the school and noted in previous chapters manifests itself in the classroom, and the ways that teachers attempt to control or harness this unruliness. As noted earlier, the concept of the *unruly atmosphere* draws on the language of affect (Massumi, 2002) and Anderson's work on atmosphere (Anderson, 2009). The *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School was certainly produced, in part, by the human bodies in the school (particularly, but not only, the children's bodies). However, as Anderson notes, "if atmospheres proceed from and are created by bodies, they are not, however, reducible to them" (Anderson, 2009: 80). The *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School was not purely reducible to the children's unruly bodies. It was impacted and informed by the institution, the architecture, the adults in the school, the regional policy perspective and the disruptions in Valley School (finally leading to its planned closure). All of these inform the *unruly atmosphere*, in much the same way that Massey suggests that we recognise space as constituted by the interrelations of "the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2005: 9).

Primarily drawing on ethnographic observations and field notes I took during classes, this chapter will show the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* manifests itself largely through noise (and to a lesser extent, movement). By tracking noise (and other forms of unruliness) throughout the observations, I am able to look at the ways in which the children are controlled and disciplined in classes, and the ways in which their noise and movement contributes to the *unruly atmosphere* during these periods. Noise and movement are seen as indicators of misbehaviour by the teaching staff, and they did indicate flare-ups in the *unruly atmosphere* to myself. These embodied, sensory experiences draw on literature previously explored in this thesis, including Massumi's

(2002) ideas on the sensory experiences of space, Massey (2005) theoretical approaches to space, Taylor's (2013) work on objects, movement and space in education, as well as introducing Gershon's (2013) research on tracking and using sound in qualitative research.

Rather than setting up an adversarial binary between teachers and students, I prefer to track the ways that the children's actions and 'unruliness' are specific and often context dependent, and the ways in which school disorganisation, different teaching styles and certain words and conditions (e.g. exams and tests) affect the *unruly atmosphere* in the classroom. The *unruly atmosphere* is presented in this chapter as a kind of force, a pervasive material and discursive current that could be subdued or intensified depending on the situation. It is not a force that obeys one person's control, nor is it under the institution's control: rather, it is something that flows, something that is experienced in an embodied and sensory way (in much the same way as space has been shown to be experienced during this thesis). As noted by Anderson earlier, "if atmospheres proceed from and are created by bodies, they are not, however, reducible to them" (Anderson, 2009: 80). Though the children's embodied and sensory experiences in the classroom may have been the most obvious external enactment of the *unruly atmosphere* in Valley School, this chapter will show how the atmosphere was entangled with all of the other factors and elements listed above. I will show via observations the ways in which this atmosphere ebbs, flows, and changes, sometimes moving from class to class, and changing with teacher and student behaviours.

As well as this, this chapter will further explore the ways in which this atmosphere was to some extent affected by macro institutional pressures, and the ways in which the breakdown of school order (e.g. by teacher absence) seemed to impact and increase the unruliness present in the school. Here I am attempting to paint a picture of an unruliness and instability inherent in the institution itself, filtering down from policy and budgetary restraints, through management, into the day-to-day running of the school, and the ways in which this 'institutional unruliness' mirrors, affects and runs parallel to the children's unruliness. An element of this part of the analysis will take the form of reflections and analysis on the research process. It will look at the ways in which my interactions with the institutional disorganisation and spatial restrictions as a researcher led me to empathise with the children's *spatial negotiations*, and gave me an insight into the importance that space has in their daily lives. As I have suggested, in attempting to analyse these elements of the children's experiences in class, this chapter puts the final piece into the spatial puzzle of the school: the classroom, and what goes on inside and around it. This further deepens our understanding of the spatial and behavioural negotiations that the children are engaged in on a daily basis inside the school. This element links back to Massey's proposition that space and spatial relations are constituted through interactions that range "from the immensity of the

global to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005: 9). The macro institutional and regional influences can be seen here as part of the “immensity of the global” – the children’s minute-by-minute spatial experiences the “intimately tiny” (Massey, 2005: 9).

The Classroom Research Routine: A Recap

Before delving into the analysis, however, I would just like to recap the general research routine that I had when observing classes in the school. I regularly conducted classroom observations in Welsh, English, French, and PSE. For Welsh, that meant two classes on a Monday and Tuesday afternoon. For English, this was two classes on a Monday and Tuesday morning. For PSE, this was one weekly class on a Tuesday morning at 0900 am, and for French this was two classes a week, on a Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday. Each class was 50 – 55 minutes long approximately, and the children had six lessons a day. As I was often observing the same classes, I was able to build a picture of the different routines that each class observed. I tended to sit with the students, or off in a corner, when observing classes. I was mindful not to talk to them very much in classes as teaching was occurring, and so would sit with my notepad and take field notes as the class went on.

Typically, the class would be given five minutes to get from one class to another. Once the pupils arrived at their next class they were either expected to line up outside the classroom (this happened before Welsh and French lessons) or the teacher had an ‘open door’ policy which meant students could enter as they arrived (as happened in English and PSE). If the students were expected to line up outside class, they would have to wait for the teacher to permit them to come into the class. This would typically mean the teacher coming out into the corridor, restoring order and then allowing the class to enter.

Once the children entered the classroom, they were, depending on the lesson, subject to a seating plan. Teachers often used seating plans as a way to maintain order and movement in the class, as well as to break up supposedly disruptive or troublesome friendship groups during teaching time. Not every lesson had a seating plan, and those that did were subject to weekly change. Teachers would typically announce the seating plans as the class walked in. Therefore, students did not always know where they would be sitting or who they would be sitting with once they entered class.

This was the research routine for six months in terms of classroom observations, from January until the end of June 2015. I will now go into analysis of this particular element of the data corpus.

6.2 From the Corridors to the Classes: Controlling the *Unruly Atmosphere*

The following extract is taken from one of my first ethnographic observations and meetings with the class, and I include it here as it pertains to all of the elements analysed in this chapter. The *unruly atmosphere* as manifested in class through noise and movement, the ways in which institutional disorganisation impacts on this unruliness, and my own experiences of dealing with these issues as a researcher.

I arrive at the school and am once again supposed to be meeting Mrs Jones so she can take me down to class and collect consent forms. I wait anxiously in the staff room, hoping that this meeting with the class generates more interaction and interest in the research than the previous week. She does not arrive in the staff room and I get an email from her saying she won't be in school today. I go to reception so I can ask the receptionist where the classroom is as I have only been there once and cannot remember how to get there. I am anxious as Mrs Jones won't be there to re-introduce me to the class, but hopefully their PSE teacher will remember me from the previous week and act as an initial intermediary

There is a scrum of kids at reception, reporting absences and various other pastoral activities. It takes a good few minutes before I can speak to the receptionist. She seems flustered and is unsure who I am. I explain once again and she takes me down to the PSE class. When I walk in the kids are there but there is no teacher. I sit down for a minute, saying hello to some of the kids who are talking loudly and noisily. The noise is intense in the class and I feel conspicuous, especially as there is no teacher present and I was hoping someone could introduce me again to the class. I ask the kids if their teacher has been in today and they say no. I ask them who their teacher is and they say Mrs Davies (alias) but she is off on long term sick. They seem uncertain as to who might be covering Mrs Davies. One of the children (later I learn this is John) asks me if I will be teaching them today. I say no, I'm not a teacher. I sit and wait, feeling awkward as I'm not sure what to do here with no teacher present. It feels strange that I am just allowed to sit in this class with the children with no other teacher or adult present, with no mediator between them and me. It also feels very intimidating, as I am building myself up to try and speak them over their noise and unruliness, without the authority granted to me by a teacher or familiarity. They look at me quizzically and they are unsure why I'm there. I go back to reception and ask the receptionist if the teacher is in or not. She says they should have a teacher but isn't sure who it should be. She says she will try to find out. I get the feeling that this happens a lot. I go back to the class and decide to speak to them about the research. This is difficult as I was hoping the teacher could re-introduce me, and I have to quiet the class down. They are incredibly noisy, shouting, screaming throwing things. I try and get their attention by speaking loudly and some of the girls at the front tell the class to shut up. They finally quiet down and I ask them if they remember me from last week and if

anyone brought consent forms back. Nobody has brought the forms back, but some of them say they remember me. I explain the research again and say I would really like them to take part, boys or girls. They ask for more forms so I give out parental consent forms again. I explain the activities I want to do, the walking tours and interviews etc. Phil seems interested. I ask them what they normally do in this lesson and they say they don't know, they haven't had a teacher since before Christmas. I leave at 0930 but it feels strange to just leave them unsupervised. I feel a sense of responsibility to them as if I were employed by the school. I mention to the receptionist that I am leaving now and that there is still no teacher there. She says she's not sure what happened but that 'they should have a teacher'.

The lack of a teacher here is also difficult for me because I was hoping to utilise their form teacher for assistance with setting up the research. Their normal form teacher is off sick and their substitute is not here. This is going to make interacting with them very difficult initially, as this class was to be my main point of contact.

Revisiting this extract at this point is a fairly poignant experience. Many of the elements that would form the core of my analysis were present in this early interaction with the school and the children. It is also poignant because it points to the ways in which the children are sat right in the middle of a maelstrom of micro and macro institutional, organisational, spatial and social pressures which, as I came to conclude, contribute to the existence of the *unruly atmosphere* in the school. Indeed, this atmosphere seemed to hit me full in the face on this particular day, with the absence of not only my research contact Mrs Jones but any teacher at all. This, combined with the full force of the children's noise and unruliness in their unsupervised classroom, really introduced me to the palpable unruliness and chaos in this school, and challenges such as this led a certain amount of anxiety in my attempts to undertake successful and thorough research at the school. This anxiety was born of a concern that I would not be able to gain suitable opportunities to conduct research in the school, or gain the support of research champions (Heath *et al.*, 2007) to assist me with conducting research in the school. Though I ended up building a good rapport with the children which enabled me to conduct my ethnographic research successfully, our interactions were often hindered or derailed by organisational and spatial challenges. I reflect on this anxiety because I wonder to what extent the children (who could not come and go as they pleased, like I could) felt a similar way about the school.

This extract also serves to introduce the reader to my own initial experience of the *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School. By revisiting this extract, I am able to show how my spatial experience and negotiation of Valley School was a sensory, embodied, affective experience. I experienced space and atmosphere in a similar (but not the same) way as the children. The atmosphere was affective. The experience of it chimes with Anderson's description of atmosphere

as a “more” (Anderson, 2009: 80). He notes that for him, “the concept of atmosphere is good to think with because it holds a series of opposites – presence and absence, materiality and ideality, definite and indefinite, singularity and generality – in a relation of tension” (Anderson, 2009: 80). This sense of atmosphere as ‘more’, as both an excess and a lack, chimed with my sensory spatial experience of it (in the above extract, and throughout my fieldwork) and also with the ways in which I observed the children and staff experiencing the *unruly atmosphere* in the school. In the above extract, the atmosphere was an excess of sound and bodily movement, but also an absence – the absence of a teacher, the absence of order, the absence of expectations that have not been met by the school. If atmosphere is located “in a relation of tension” (Anderson, 2009: 80) then this tension was affectively and emotionally palpable in Valley School, in myriad multitudinous ways.

The classroom space was a site where the *unruly atmosphere* in the school could be both explicitly manifested and explicitly disciplined and controlled. It was a site where teachers and students attempted to control and negotiate the unruliness of the school: the teachers attempting to diminish, control or even harness it into learning and academic progress, and the students negotiating it (and sometimes using it or exploiting it) in myriad different ways. In many ways, the classroom was the eye of the storm of ‘unruliness’ and is therefore central to the idea that I have been developing throughout this thesis.

As I have noted, in terms of space, the children have little to no choice about *what* classroom space they are going to inhabit: their timetables are set, the locations of the classes are (for the most part) the same, and to some extent even where they sit in the class may be predetermined by the teacher (through the frequent use of seating plans). Therefore, the children do not choose the space that they are going to inhabit in the same way they do in the spaces addressed in previous chapters; what they choose is *how* to behave in such a space. This chapter, then, attempts to map these behaviours in the classroom space and the ways in which those behaviours contribute to, and are affected by, the *unruly atmosphere* in the school. One of the primary ways that the *unruly atmosphere* presents itself in the classroom space is through the force of noise. This section shows how noise occurs, what it feels like to the researcher, how teachers attempt to control it, and how it plays into the wider *unruly atmosphere* in the school, as well as linking to literature on affect, sound and space.

Think about the power of NOISE in the classroom – the kids make it, the teachers have to control it, the noise is not the same as words. Noise can be both individual and overlapping. Groups make noise, it is not always words. It seems to ebb and flow around the class room almost in reaction to each other. Even as I write this Phil imitates a crying noise loudly, and puts his head in his hands. The teacher has to tell him off. Noise is power, alongside materiality and bodily performance.

(Extract from field notes observations, Welsh class 9th March 2015)

This is one of my first observations concerning the power of noise in the classroom. Noise seemed to be one of the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* in the school most explicitly manifested itself. It also seemed, like space, to play a prominent part in the daily lives of everyone in the school, from students to teachers. Indeed, there were prominent signs in many of the corridors saying things like QUIET PLEASE and NO NOISE IN THE CORRIDORS. Noise was like a material manifestation of the unruliness in the school, an audible register misbehaviour and order. It was a force that overlapped between individuals and groups of students and reverberated around the school corridors, often being intercepted by teachers and their own form of ‘acceptable’ disciplinary noise. This manifested in shouting at students to keep noise down, or in class using the count system to enforce quiet (this involved counting down loudly from five to one: by one, students were expected to be quiet). This links to Gershon’s suggestion that “while at one level sounds “are,” their interpretation and how they are utilized is inexorably linked to questions of power” (Gershon, 2013: 2). In Valley School, sound and noise were always entangled in power relations in some way, whether that be power between the teaching staff and the children, or between the children themselves.

Of course, noise and noise control are common issues in schools, and in some regards, Valley School was not unusual in how noise manifested itself or in its attempt to address noise as a problem. However, as I go on to show, the noise in this school seems to tell us something about the particular dynamics in play at the school during the time I was there. They contribute to the pervasive *unruly atmosphere* that I encountered at the school, and in combination with large institutional and regional policy issues, seemed to contribute to this overall atmosphere in Valley School. I will demonstrate this further throughout the chapter.

One of the classes I observed on a regular basis was Welsh class, which took place at 1405 on Monday and Tuesday afternoons. This made it the last lesson of the day, and Mrs Jones, the teacher there, commented in an individual interview that she felt that the specific placement of Welsh at the end of the timetable made the class (and noise) more difficult to control:

‘Mrs Jones: Uh I have my ups and downs with them, I don’t like the fact that the only time I teach them is last lesson of the day, twice a week, I don’t feel like I get the best out of them, I don’t feel like they get the best from me, I don’t feel like I get the best out of them

Sion: I get you. Is that sort of to do with just literally – time, like it’s the last lesson-

Mrs Jones: I think so yeah, it’s the last lesson of the day, they wanna sort of wind down and chill a little bit but obviously I got my levels that I’ve gotta get out of them, I’ve got my targets, I’ve got

things that I have to get out of the kids when they do just want a bit of a nice easy lesson at the end of the day, so that can be tough. They're a very mixed bag, I find that there's kids in there that probably should be in a higher group that can be pushed a little bit more

(Extract from individual interview with Mrs Jones, 9th June 2015)

The temporal aspect of controlling unruliness seemed important to the teachers I spoke to about noise and behaviour; they felt that the time of day that their class took place affected the children's behaviour. This is to some degree a subjective observation on their part, and I could not say for certain that the classes I observed earlier in the day (such as PSE, or English) inspired less noise or better behaviour from the group. Multiple factors seemed to affect the behaviour of the class, and the ensuing *unruly atmosphere* and noise levels. These factors included which lesson it was, the type of work they were doing (group work, written work, test work, revision, coursework), their relationship with the teacher, the disciplinary expectations of the teacher, the children's relationships with each other, along with myriad other environmental factors e.g. temperature in class, sunlight shining on the whiteboard, etc. Nevertheless, it seemed to be a common sense truth that classes would be more difficult and unruly at the end of the day amongst staff in the school. I discussed the way this misbehaviour would manifest in the form of noise with Mrs Jones in my interview with her:

Sion: ...One thing I noticed which is huge is noise

Mrs Jones: Noise

Sion: Yeah tell me about noise

Mrs Jones: (Laughs) Well, by the time they get here lesson six, noise is completely out of control, so um I, oh, I bet lesson one they're a completely different class (Extract from individual interview with Mrs Jones, 9th June 2015)

Gershon suggests that sound and noise "can be understood to form educational systems of knowledge" (Gershon, 2013: 2). Mrs Jones displays this by noting how important noise is to her understanding of this particular class, and how 'out of control' they might be. Again, we can see here that Mrs Jones feels that the *temporal* aspect is integral to the production of noise in her classroom – 'by the time they get here lesson six, noise is completely out of control' and 'I bet lesson one they're a completely different class'. These comments may contain some experiential truths, although as I said, these were subjective at best and played into a 'common sense' narrative about behaviour that was prevalent amongst most of the teaching staff I spoke to in the school. I further discussed noise with Mrs Jones in this interview, and the ways it manifested as a kind of palpable and tangible force in the school, that was bigger than any one individual:

Sion: So it's like – cause there's, it's funny thinking about like noise cause there's noise in the sense of you can be out in the corridor and hear noise from a class, you're not hearing individuals talking, you're hearing-

Mrs Jones: A buzz (laughs)

Sion: A buzz, yeah but then obviously you've gotta control that in general you know so, but then you've also gotta deal with individuals talking

Mrs Jones: That want attention (Extract from individual interview with Mrs Jones, 9th June 2015)

I was attempting to describe to Mrs Jones the strange sensation of the noise of the class and the school, as although it was a sonic force generated by individuals it was bigger than any one individual. Mrs Jones eloquently describes it as a 'buzz', and this was a particularly apt description of the way noise felt in the school, especially for me as an outsider who was not used to it. The 'buzz' description also highlights the way in which noise was a force that was bigger than any one individual, the way it was almost a sound associated with groups of children and the school in general. The school gave off a 'buzz' of noise, to varying levels of intensity, at different times and in different spaces during the day. This idea of a force emanating from bodies but 'more' than the sum of its parts (e.g. those bodies) links back to Anderson's suggestion that atmospheres can be described as a "more" (Anderson, 2009) that sit in relations of tension. The 'buzz' of noise was a very important part of the *unruly atmosphere* I observed in Valley School. There are parallels here with Gershon's definition of noise and sound. He states that "sounds are methodologically valuable as they sit at the paradox of human experience—utterly individualistic and inescapably sociocultural in their interpretation" (Gershon, 2013: 2). The 'buzz' that Mrs Jones describes is primarily made up of "utterly individualistic" (Gershon, 2013) sounds, yet at the same time is cumulatively and affectively 'more' than that. It could also include non-human sounds such as building work, noises from pipes, noise from the road outside (although these were far less conspicuous than the sounds made by the human children).

From here, I will introduce extracts from classroom observations which will show the ways that noise actually manifested itself in class, and the ways in which teaching staff attempted to deal with it. This will give the reader an insight into the ways in which noise and unruliness felt in the classroom spaces of the school. I will attempt to include an extract from each of the classes I observed, to give an insight into the different disciplinary techniques that staff used to maintain order and control noise in the class. The first extract will be from English, which was typically the most 'controlled' class in terms of noise, movement and unruliness:

Think about the school – nothing works, lights shine on the board, rooms are too hot or too cold, never seats etc. What does this say to the kids? The plush meeting room is off limits to me and the kids.

This is the quietest class. Kids are treated sensitively but firmly. Where is noise and movement in this class? The body? The kids liven up when doing a task. Some talk and movement is allowed but monitored. Teachers come round and see how kids are doing. They try to speak to them directly as much as they can.

George bites his nails and fiddles with the pen further. Brad turns round and speaks to him, laughing in a high voice. George brings his hands to his mouth.

The kids mark each other's work at the end and noise levels increase during this class, but not to an extreme level.

Bodies are more controlled in this class, no standing and moving as in Welsh and French.

The teacher counts down from 3 tells the kids 'you are being very selfish if you are talking instead of marking'.

Teachers constantly use the counting technique to quiet the class. This is where they loudly start counting down from 5 to 1. The children seem to know implicitly what this means, and by the end of the counting they are quiet. They raise their voice whilst doing so (Extract from field notes observations, English class, 24th March 2015).

This extract from English shows a number of the ways in which noise and movement is controlled in the classroom. English was generally the most 'controlled' of the classes I observed, with very few occasions of extreme unruliness or noisiness. The teachers here (one trainee, one permanent) seemed to be able to garner a level of calmness from the class that was not always evident in the other classes. One of the key techniques they used (although this was used school wide) was the 'counting technique' described above. When noise levels reached a certain unacceptable pitch, the teacher would loudly start counting down from 5 to 1. By the end of the counting, the children were expected to be quiet. They implicitly seemed to know what this technique meant the moment it started happening. I enquired about this in my interview with Mrs Hollis, the PSE teacher and safety officer for the school:

Sion: And I don't necessarily, obviously cause it's a funny thing right cause you've got like, individuals that talk (someone walks in and says 'wrong person, sorry') (laughs) and then, but you've also got the cumulative noise of the class, so would you agree with that?

Mrs Hollis: Definitely

Sion: And how do you feel, how do you feel about managing that?

Mrs Hollis: Um, we have brought in sort of new rules and you will hear people doing the countdown 54321-

Sion: Yeah absolutely

Mrs Hollis: Um, and usually that does settle them down, I feel that it's it's come from primary school as well

Sion: That's interesting, yeah

Mrs Hollis: Because a lot of us have been into primary schools now but to do transition work, and we've been horrified by the amount of noise in primary schools, yeah, so it's come up with them from primary, however you'd think by the time they got into Year Eight, with the new rules they would you know expect to be quieter, and I really don't know what it is with them, I know in PSE they're all in a huge group because there's 32 of them I think in that group and they've all got their little friendship groups it's like the group of boys that sit at the back they are very very noisy they're constantly, you know, um, and the other thing that worries me about it is that the amount of time they spend talking rather than listening, they talk very well but they don't listen well, you know and so when they're talking and you're constantly having to do the 54321 then they're missing out as well, it's when you're missing a lot of lesson time (Extract from individual interview with Mrs Hollis, 18th June 2015)

Here, Mrs Hollis details the ways in which all students are expected to be familiar with 'the count system' and the ways in which noise is a perennial problem, transitioning from primary school to secondary school. The effectiveness of this technique varied across the classes I observed however, and its effectiveness seemed to have something to do with the relationship between the students and teachers of that particular class. In English, the teachers seemed able to control noise and movement due to their favourable relationship with the children. This class was one where noise rarely bubbled over into disruption and one where the *unruly atmosphere* of the school was largely kept dormant. There was a consistency to the lessons, the seating plan, and the tone of the class, and the children seemed comfortable with that. I use this extract as a kind of base level look at the classroom space: to see how it appeared when things were going well, for the teachers at least. This also again links back to Gershon's assessment that sounds and noise "form educational systems of knowledge" (Gershon, 2013: 2). In this case, the knowledge they formed was explicitly educational – the ways in which the children did or did not make noise had implications for how educationally advanced they were, and noise was a marker of where they should be in relation to their age and school year.

From here I will analyse some extracts from Welsh class, which typically was rather more chaotic, and was a class where the *unruly atmosphere* (in the form of noise and movement) more regularly erupted into what was classified by the teaching staff as 'disruptive' behaviour. These extracts will show the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school could manifest itself in the classroom space.

I sit waiting in class while Mrs Jones and Miss Laurie go outside to quiet the children down. Miss Laurie is a trainee Welsh teacher who teaches the class occasionally. As the children come in, Matt says hello to me.

Ms Laurie plays a timed game with them – this involves time ticking down while they attempt to get the right answers and complete the game first. This pressure seems fun for the children, though noise levels do increase as the children frantically try to complete the game first.

Phil's group shouts that they are done.

Matt says 'they're cheating!'

Ms Laurie introduces a new game. This time, she throws a ball around the room to whoever says the right answer first. They then throw it back to her, she asks another question, and she throws it to the person who answers right first. Here there is still noise, but it seems to be being harnessed by Ms Laurie to deliver learning. The children are excited at the use of the ball and the game to deliver learning. Once this game is finished, books are passed round, as well as sheets and handouts.

Prior to class I witness some of the girls shove a boy into the doors. He laughs. What happens between classes?

Ms Laurie says 'I think someone is gonna burst over here if I don't go to them!' in response to one child urgently asking a question and putting their hand up.

Drew asks Matt why he's laughing. Matt ignores him.

Ms Laurie uses a game to remember a sentence where she varies the loudness of her voice and the kids imitate. She is literally using noise and volume here to deliver learning. The noise at this stage is permitted by the teacher, and therefore seems somehow more positive and acceptable.

Ms Laurie reintroduces the ball again. This gets thrown around more – some people drop it. Brad drops it, says 'ow', then throws it back at the teacher with force.

Matt says 'yeah I'm gonna shout' in response to another talk based game.

Literally a game about who makes the most noise. Each half of the room has to say the time in Welsh louder than the other. They shout and scream but with teachers permission.

The next game uses laminate arrows the kids stick to the board to indicate correct time. Kids give thumbs up or down to indicate who is right or wrong.

Finally, at the end of the class, a writing task comes, where the children are expected to quiet down and use the learning from the class to complete a written task. Ms Laurie uses the count system to quiet the children down as they are still audibly excited from the preceding noisy learning games. Now, when noise bubbles up it feels like a disruption, as it has not been permitted by the teacher. Some of the children get told off for being noisy during the written task. I can see that for some of them it is difficult to transition from noisy to quiet.

Noise means different things at different times. Permission to make noise from teachers makes it different. (Extract from Welsh class, 10th March 2015)

Here, Ms Laurie the trainee teacher attempts to use noise, objects and movement to deliver learning in the form of teaching games. This seems to work particularly well in Welsh, where there is a core oral and vocal element to the learning, and where children will be expected to take oral as well as written exams at the end of the year. This is one of the few occasions where noise and volume seemed positive and permitted in class; indeed, Ms Laurie successfully used the children's voices to deliver learning. They seemed audibly and visibly excited by the fact that they could make a lot of noise and it was permitted and even encouraged by the teacher. Rather than attempt to eradicate noise and discipline the children for making noise, Ms Laurie used a novel approach to deliver the learning, which harnessed the children's capacity for making noise in a positive way.

However, as we can see at the end of the extract, once noise was no longer permitted and the children were expected to quiet down and complete a written task, some of them struggled to transition to quiet work and noise became disruptive again. The encroachment of a specific, academic written task into the previously noisy and vibrant classroom seemed to signify a different kind of discipline and behaviour, and the children seemed to find it difficult to transition from the previously permitted noise levels to quietness. This issue came up more prominently in another Welsh class later on in the year, where Ms Laurie again attempted to use learning games to deliver teaching:

Ms Laurie goes out into the corridor and loudly shouts 'be quiet!' to the noisy children who are waiting in line. The children quiet down and walk into the class. They all stand at their desks in silence. Books get handed out which denotes sitting down. 'Folders are coming around' says Ms

Laurie. This means the class is beginning. Jonathan hands the books out. He seems to do this most weeks.

Phil tells me about going on rugby tour and that he lost his voice singing. He tells me there was karaoke. He tells me his mum sang 'sex bomb'.

Noise again is kept quiet by the count system. I notice the pupils sometimes say 'shhh' as well. When Ms Laurie wants the class to repeat in unison she raises her voice.

Ms Laurie plays the noise game again, raising her voice with some answers, going to a whisper with others. The class are expected to mimic her which they do reasonably accurately.

I notice how I'm beginning to side with the kids when they get told off. I'm tired by the end of the day and at times the relentless policing of their behaviour gets tiresome. There is always a sense of tension in the air.

I sit near Drew and Matt in Welsh, who I previously conducted the walking tour with, and it feels strange because I have to sit quiet and can't interact even though I know them now from interviews.

Noise flows as an affective force. The teacher tried to control it by shushing the class. I'm tired by the end of the day and start to detach. Like them.

Ms North says they are going to play the 'mobile phone game'. This is laminated images of phones to pass around. Whoever is left holding the phone when the music finishes answers a question. The kids all stand up to play the game. Ms Laurie plays the song 'Happy' through the computer to start the game. Noise levels increase from the children as the music plays and they become excited. Drew mock dances when the song starts up again. He then looks at me and punches the table lightly.

The game ends abruptly when one of the boys, John, receives the phone, and instead of answering a question, he throws the laminate backwards, saying that he doesn't want to answer. The children laugh, but Ms Laurie shouts at them, and John, saying that they've ruined the game now and that they can't carry on playing now. The teacher reprimands them and says they will have to stay for 10 mins in break tomorrow.

Matt starts to ask a question but Ms Laurie interrupts him. He then puts his hand up and she pays attention. The children are not permitted to speak unless they put their hands up and the teacher explicitly tells them to.

The lesson winds down on a negative note. The fallout from the disruption of the phone game has created a palpable tension in the class. Ms Laurie shouts at the children to stop moving and stop being noisy. They do not seem to be able to transition from the excitement of the game to the disciplinary atmosphere that now exists.

Mrs Jones, who has been sitting at the back observing the whole time, gets up and shouts at them intensely before they go. The shouting is really intense and loud; it is almost screaming. She says their behaviour has been disgusting (not my impression). They are all made to stand while she shouts. Her and Ms Laurie's impression of them as being badly behaved and noisy seems at a counterpoint to my own. They were a little noisy but Ms Laurie encouraged boisterousness through her learning games. These games encourage movement and noise. It seems confusing as the kids are permitted on the one hand to make noise and move and then reprimanded for doing it too much, or not in the correct way.

After the class Mrs Jones and Ms Laurie discuss how badly behaved the children were, and how difficult this class is. I can see it has been stressful for them, though it strikes me that the way they talk about the kids feels like an adversarial relationship. I wonder who is sensitive to the kids' personal needs? Who cares about them as people? (Extract from field notes, Welsh class 24th March 2015)

This extract clearly shows the ways in which noise and unruliness, even when permitted, can spill over into supposedly disruptive behaviour. Ms Laurie again uses learning games in this class, but this time the transition from loud noise and movement to quiet is abrupt and disciplinary. John's refusal to take part in the mobile phone game, and his subsequent expression of this refusal through the throwing on the phone, brings the whole 'acceptable' noise period to an abrupt end, as Ms Laurie and then Mrs Jones loudly punish the class for their so-called 'disgusting' behaviour.

As may be apparent from my tone here, I held a different view than the teachers of the children's behaviour in this extract. It seemed to me that the children simply became too excited by the permissiveness of noise and movement in the class, and that one of them merely overstepped the boundary in what was 'acceptable' behaviour in this new permissive environment. The physiological as well as social affects seem to play a part here; the increase in noise and movement seemed to excite the children in an embodied way, and perhaps John did not realise how his one spontaneous action would be interpreted by the teachers.

This can also be linked to Anderson's ideas on the affective nature of atmospheres, and particularly Gershon's ideas on sound and noise. Gershon suggests that "the sonic is resonance and knowledge, vibrational affects that effect how individuals and groups are and know" (Gershon, 2013: 2). In the above extract, we can see how the resonance and vibrations of sound

affects the way that this group of children and their teachers are 'known'. Known to each other, and known to me. We can also see the ways in which the space of the classroom contains multiplicities, and the product of interrelations. Even in the short time of this one class, we have seen the relations between teachers and children go from progressive, innovative and energetic to disrupted, malicious, excessive (on both staff and children's parts, from my perspective). There is so much going on when considering the classroom space from these affective, spatial and sensory perspectives that tells us not only about those phenomena but also about the social relations created by, and contained within, those phenomena.

The point of unpacking this incident is not to criticise the teachers, however. I recognise that they were under a lot of pressure to deliver learning in interesting and exciting ways, and have to keep order in the classroom in order to do this. What I am trying to get at is the way that rules regarding acceptable levels of noise and movement are open to frequent and drastic changes in the classroom, and to give the reader an insight into how these changes may be difficult for some children (like John) to navigate and negotiate. It did not appear to me as if the children were consciously trying to take advantage of the permissive atmosphere brought on by the mobile phone game; they seemed genuinely excited and pleased to be playing this game, and also seemed (like me) slightly shocked with how abruptly it ended, and how severely they were admonished afterwards. There also seemed to be a relationship between the frequency and intensity of discipline and punishment, and the noise and unruliness in the class: in English, I rarely heard the teachers scream and shout at the class in the way that Mrs Jones did here, and I also rarely heard the class get as noisy or unruly as in the above extract. It was almost as if the teachers 'noise', in the form of loud admonishment, increased the children's 'noise' in that particular class.

To what extent does that example illustrate what I have been calling the *unruly atmosphere* in the school? At one level, it can be read as a routine instance of classroom management gone awry – hardly uncommon, particularly when the teacher in charge is a trainee. However, the growing sense I gained in my time at the school was of something more particular going on: an edge of chaos (sometimes more intense, sometimes less) threatening to get out of control. If Valley School is hardly the only school that is noisy and experiences disruptive behaviour, the sense of chaos present in it – the pervasive *unruly atmosphere* – had a particular quality that was in excess of everyday behaviour management issues of the type schools deal with routinely. It was there in the 'buzz' of the children's noise, in the volume of the teachers' shouted instructions, and in the way the children had to pick up on different expectations of what was an acceptable level of noise and movement in different classes. This negotiation is a bodily one, similar to their *spatial negotiations* during break times, in that they have to regulate their bodies

and voices in an acceptable way. This gives us an insight into the multiple spatial and bodily negotiations they are dealing with constantly throughout the school day.

As a counter-point to the above extract, and in trying to create a sense of narrative to these extracts, I will now present an extract from the class that immediately preceded the Welsh lesson above, on the 24th March 2015. This was a French lesson, but no ordinary French lesson; it was a lesson where a test took place, and the power that this word has over the students was palpable in the ways their behaviour changed, particularly in light of the noise of the Welsh lesson analysed above.

Teacher comes out into the hallway and tell the children that there is an exam today. The class becomes really quiet.

Leroy mocks throwing a book at John, who smiles and holds his hands out.

Teacher keeps her voice low. The kids seem to understand what an exam means and act accordingly.

Phil seems to float between groups – he plays sport and banters with John and Leroy but Becky tells me that he hangs round with the girls as well

Brandon puts his elbow on the table puts his head in the crook, wraps his hand around his head and wraps his feet around each other. His body is often contorted.

Test conditions are really different to normal class. Noise is kept to quiet whispers and the teacher keeps her voice low. Movement is also restricted. The teacher occasionally says ‘shhh’. She keeps the flow noise low, almost being sensitive to it.

Certain words are cues for behaviour;

EXAM/TEST

PRACTICAL

HANDOUTS

‘Take your bag off Drew’

Teacher uses objects to denote beginning of test:

‘Put your books on the desk facing upwards.’ –

The window is open, and the wind blows the blinds against the wall. Some of the kids look around at this, but remain quiet.

Phil stares straight ahead with his hands in a ball up against his mouth with his pen in his hands. Objects and body parts are for comfort as well as disruption.

The blinds blow more intensely. More kids look around. There is total verbal silence. Noise only comes from and objects and bodies.

Drew puts his pencil to his lips. He rests his head in the air on his hand.

Jonathan puts his hand up and asks for a tissue. Later Jonathan gets up and puts the tissue in the bin with a mischievous look on his face. Being able to walk seems subtly disruptive in this test environment.

Phil puts his hand up and asks how long. Miss says 7 mins. The class murmurs and rumbles as they seem to feel this isn't enough time.

Towards the end noise levels rise. Brad becomes physically agitated, moving his legs then putting his head down on the desk.

Think about how my role lets me see the kids as people, not as children or students only. The teachers may not get the space to do this.

Change is constant, how can they form long lasting relationships with adults?

The teacher lets the kids know the test is finishing. Noise levels rise subtly. She asks for blue books to go in the basket. Immediately the kids know that this is the end and noise levels rise considerably. This is their cue. They know they can move and can talk.

They work off cues. Verbal cues like the counting down technique, and cues from objects – once academic objects are being packed away (e.g. blue books) class is finishing and the children can pack their bags away and get ready to leave. (Extract from French, 24th March 2015)

Here we have an interesting counterpoint to the noise and disruption that occurred in the extract from Welsh, a class which occurred immediately *after* this French class. The moment that the teacher came into the hallway and told the class that this was an exam, and that *exam conditions* were to be observed, the children's demeanour changed and they became very quickly quiet. Unlike the difficult transitions from loud to quiet in the extract from Welsh, once they heard the word exam, they immediately and smoothly transitioned to almost total silence, and remained this way for the whole lesson. This was one of the few times where I observed the *unruly atmosphere* of the school being almost entirely subdued, in class or out. It would appear that certain words and academic discourses held a powerful meaning for the students and their behaviour, with the word 'exam' being one of the most powerful. The power of this word and its

meanings was one of the few times that noise, movement and general unruliness were subdued during class. It appeared that the students, despite the chaos, knew that examinations and tests were important parts of their learning, and wanted to behave correctly in this period. It was almost as if the word 'exam' or 'test' had an authority beyond the institution itself – that all children in all schools sat tests, and that even in this chaotic, unruly school, attempts were made to comply with this national standard. Of course, this is speculative interpretation, but that is certainly how it felt to me in those moments. It also links back to Gershon's statement about sound forming "educational systems of knowledge" (Gershon, 2013: 2). Here, in this specific test environment, the *lack* of sound and its specific prohibition helps to form the knowledge of what an exam should feel like, from a sensory perspective.

The ways in which this was noticeable in the above extract were myriad, but generally, material and audible. The lack of physical movement was noticeable. Though children would not typically get up and walk around in class, in their seats and groups they would be whirlwinds of movement, twirling pens, throwing paper, kicking legs, fumbling through pencil cases. They would also be *loud*; the 'buzz' of noise that the children generated was completely gone. The absence of the *unruly atmosphere* in this class was almost as striking to me as my introduction to said atmosphere. I could hear the blinds blowing against the back wall, I could see the minute ways in which the children attempted to use objects (silently) to comfort, distract, or focus themselves. The point here is that I could notice the minutiae of the classroom environment and the children's actions because the usual unruliness and chaos was dialled down so much.

I observed a few more exam/test classes during my time at Valley School, and it was usually the same experience; a class that would typically be noisy and raucous (like Welsh) would suddenly become very quiet and obedient. I felt that this was because the prominence of academic tests and exams waxed and waned in classroom discourses during the year: some weeks were more relaxed, exploratory lessons, other weeks would be more pressured and academic as deadlines and term times drew closer. Perhaps this academic pressure fed into the *unruly atmosphere* in the school - the sense that, for both students and teachers, academic tests and pressures were right around the corner, and especially given the dwindling student numbers since the temporary school closure, these results would have more impact than ever.

To what extent the children were literally aware of these kind of concerns is debatable, but certainly, the staff were aware of these pressures, and that may have fed into their demeanour, behaviour and teaching methods. Again, I am not attempting to be critical of teaching styles here. Primarily, the teachers I met in Valley School were working under immense pressure to try and engage children from a variety of backgrounds and skill sets, often in the same class. Mrs Jones discusses this a little in my individual interview with her:

Mrs Jones:...They're a very mixed bag, I find that there's kids in there that probably should be in a higher group that can be pushed a little bit more

Sion: Cause it goes by colour right, and the colour is like the skill sort of assessment

Mrs Jones: Historically here blue has been the highest, the top set, blue has been highest, but in the last year because of the restructuring with the groups cause we've lost so many kids, um blue has become a bit of a middle ish band, so blue is still the top but also is kind of middle-ish, and um so there's some in there that you know Year Eight should be around level 4 at the moment, they're all on a level 4, there's a few of them there's about 3 or 4 of them that are on about a level 3, and there's a couple of them that could be pushed for the level 5, so it's quite hard to differentiate with so many, there's 30 – how many of them, 32 of them in the class

Sion: Ok, ok, so like there's more-cause obviously there's not many pupils in the school, when you come to divide them into sets it's more disparate, like that set there might be someone pushing a level 5, and they're really on it, and then other people find it harder

Mrs Jones: So it's hard to divide your time to try and push the ones that need pushing, work with the ones that are definitely a solid level 4 and then try and push the level 3's that should be on a level 4 anyway (Extract from individual interview with Mrs Jones, 9th June 2015)

Here, Mrs Jones discusses the impact that falling school numbers has had on the make-up of classes, and the ways in which children who are at different learning 'levels' are lumped together contributes to the difficulty in controlling the class and delivering teaching. Mrs Jones references the fall in school numbers ('in the last year...we've lost so many kids') and the ways in which this has directly impacted teaching and class structuring. With children of disparate and different learning skills and needs being lumped together in the same class, teaching becomes more difficult, and controlling the class becomes more difficult, as high achieving children may become bored or impatient, whilst lower achieving children may feel out of their depth and in turn act out or disrupt class.

The reason I bring this up is because it once again shows the trickle-down effect that macro organisational and institutional instability and 'unruliness' has on the micro, day-to-day manifestations of the *unruly atmosphere* in the school. We can draw a line from the temporary closure of the school, to the falling numbers of children attending the school, to the restructuring of classes and ability groups' right down to Mrs Jones Welsh class at 1405 on a Monday afternoon and the resulting *unruly atmosphere* that manifests there.

Going back to the previous extracts from Welsh and French shown above, I wonder how much having a test in French and having to be silent and obedient in that class impacted the

resulting manifestation of unruly behaviour in the Welsh class that occurred afterwards. Whilst I do not wish to reduce this to a simple cause and effect binary, I do wonder whether the material and physiological effects of the children having to restrain themselves from moving and talking for an hour played into the overspill of noise and movement in the Welsh class that took place directly afterwards. However, rather than frame this as a behavioural issue, or a conscious group decision to 'misbehave' now that the test was over, I see it as flows of forces: discursive, material, physiological, and sonic forces. When the children came to Welsh, the atmosphere was completely different than the French test; not only was this a 'normal' class where some talking was acceptable, there was a palpable loosening of the usual bodily restrictions, with Ms Laurie once again playing loud games, using objects and music to deliver learning. Having been present in both classes, it seemed to me that this unexpected transition from academic obedience and restraint to loud, embodied game playing with exciting objects resulted in a kind of overspill of the children's behaviour. Permitted to use their voices and bodies beyond even the usual threshold, they seemed to find it difficult to ascertain the acceptable level of behaviour, and once John decided to throw the mobile phone over his shoulder and not answer a question, he (consciously or not) tipped the class into a realm of unacceptable behaviour. This idea of a flow of material force moving between bodies and non-human bodies speaks to literature on affect (Gorton, 2007) and post-human approaches to agency (Barad, 2008). However, as discussed earlier, I was not in a position to place my data wholesale into a post-human theoretical framework during the timeframe of a doctoral programme. This may be an illuminating avenue for further analysis of this data corpus beyond this thesis.

The point of these explications and explorations of the *unruly atmosphere* in the classroom spaces is to show, once again, how many different kinds of negotiations are occurring for the children in school spaces, every day. The *spatial negotiations* they are involved in during class are just as complex as the ones they experience outside of class; but rather than the negotiation being *what* space to inhabit, it is rather *how* to inhabit the space. Although there are base level rules to school conduct, we can see in the disparity of expectations and behaviours between the silent French test and the noisy, unruly Welsh class immediately afterwards that negotiating and understanding explicit and implicit behavioural expectations in different classroom spaces can be challenging for the children, as individuals and as a group. The restraint they showed when observing test conditions made me sympathise with them when they were told off so intensely for being noisy and behaving 'badly' in Welsh; I knew first-hand that they could be 'well-behaved' as I had just witnessed them at their most restrained and obedient in the preceding French class. It seemed to me that the move from *explicit* rules (the test conditions) to permissive *implicit* rules of the learning games in Welsh caused a degree of excitement and confusion in the children that led to the so-called 'disruption'. Again, this is not an attempt to

delineate cause and effect in the children's behaviour, but rather to illustrate the myriad negotiations they are dealing with hour to hour and minute to minute, every day. Although, in this instance, the negotiations were not primarily spatial (they involved a transition from exam conditions to interactive whole-class activities), they nevertheless had spatial and material dimensions [say what]. These negotiations may be experienced to some degree by all UK children in state secondary schools; however, the point in the development of the concepts of the 'nomadic negotiations' and *unruly atmosphere* in relation to Valley School is to show how this particular school and its specific spatial make-up and institutional pressures seemed to exacerbate and intensify these typical negotiations.

6.3 Parallels Between the Research Experience and the Participant Experience of the *Unruly Atmosphere*

Following on from this theme, this section illustrates the ways in which breakdowns in the institutional order of the school seemed to intensify the *unruly atmosphere* in the school. This is a theme I have been developing across the analysis chapters, and in this section I will explicate and explore it through data extracts to show the different ways that these instances of institutional breakdown occurred. As well as this, I will reflect on my own experience as a researcher, entering the spaces of the school and attempting to carve out literal and figurative space for myself as a researcher and for my research participants. This was an ongoing challenge, and I felt many times that the chaos and 'unruliness' of the school had a direct impact on my ability to create suitable and comfortable research spaces. Despite these challenges, I was able to successfully engage the participants in research activities; however, in reflecting on the spatial and organisational challenges of researching in the school, I aim to draw parallels between my research experiences and the children's daily school experiences and *spatial negotiations*. In many ways my ad-hoc, spontaneous and continuous attempts to find spaces to conduct interviews and walking tours echoed the children's continuous engagement in the "struggle to win some space for themselves" (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006) in the school. By drawing these parallels between my own research experience and the experiences of the participants, I also subtly gesture to the post-humanist position on research. As noted in the methodology, Barad suggests that "embodiment is a matter not of being specifically situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008: 377). In drawing these parallels, I aim to move into the ambiguous area between ethnographic reflexivity and diffractive methodology. Because I did not employ a thorough post-human methodology prior to beginning fieldwork, this can only be a subtle gesturing towards post-human ideas, but by drawing these parallels in this section I am speaking to some degree of my "being of the world" of Valley School "in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008: 377).

The first extract I wish to analyse is one from the staff room, in March, where I became aware of the overlap in my own experiences and the children's experiences. It also points to the ways in which the institution at times created barriers to the research process:

Think about space re: what Becky said. Always navigating space, trying to find the safe space. This mirrors my experience as a researcher trying to find a safe confidential space to conduct interviews. There is little space for sensitivity. Kids are navigating unruly spaces constantly. The school has given me access but puts up barriers to me conducting the research in an appropriate manner.

Think about how the kids are constructed in staff room:

I hear these comments - 'Got a challenge next' 'This class is a nightmare'. The kids are adversaries, challenges. Link this to atmosphere of unruliness theory. They have to be contained and controlled. Think about how what I am doing with the kids differs from what is normally being done with them. Atmospheres, structures, results. Where is the space to breathe, to express? Think about the constant policing of behaviours by peer groups, by teachers, by other school staff (Extract from staff room, field notes, 24th March 2017)

This was one of the first times where I felt an empathy with the children's experiences, particularly from a research perspective. As I have detailed, attempting to find suitable space to carry out research in the school, particularly interviews, was tricky. I wanted to set up a regular space and time to conduct interviews with the children, but as time went on I had to grab opportunities as they came to me. I also note in the above extract the ways in which the institutional disorganisation of the school hindered the research process - though I had been granted research 'access', I was not able to truly carve out some space for myself and my participants in the school. From the above extract, we can see how, in my unique role as researcher, I was able to gain some empathy with the children and not see them as challenging or adversarial. However, I am at pains to point out that I do not think negatively or critically of the teaching staff who did view them in this way. Their pressures were different from mine, and they were under intense pressure to get educational attainment and results out of what could very well be (academically) challenging pupils. However, I had the luxury of not being concerned with the pupils' academic performance, and this gave me an unusual perspective on their experiences. I was able to see, with some clarity, the intensity of their daily lives, the noise, the unruliness, the frequent spatial negotiations, the shouting, the discipline, the nomadic wanderings from one point to the next, and my own difficulties in finding suitable regular research spaces seemed to mirror their own struggles to 'win some space' for themselves. The disparity between the needs and demands of school management and teaching staff, and the needs and experiences of the

children, became clearer to me as I occupied an unusual position in the school. Not only was I a researcher, but I was a researcher who was largely unconcerned with pedagogy or educational attainment and academic performance. I was therefore able to be more sensitive to the children's experiences that were not strictly related to their academic performance. In this way, the above extract shows how I was becoming aware of the children's experiential, material and pastoral experiences, and the ways in which they (at times) mirrored my own experiences as a researcher. I had more connections with them than with the staff; I had built a more nuanced rapport with them, I had relied on them to help me organise and attend interviews, I had relied on them for basic assistance with finding classes and had asked them to let me sit with or near them in those classes.

The second extract I wish to analyse in this section revisits and extends an extract from the second analysis chapter, concerning the unruliness in the corridors prior to Welsh when Mrs Jones was absent. I wish to re-use this extract, and extend it, as it highlights the institutional chaos present in the school and the ways in which it placed me in difficult circumstances as a researcher.

I arrive early, Mrs Jones isn't here. This strikes me as odd as she is normally in her classroom prior to the children arriving. The class room is empty, and it feels strange being on my own in class. I can hear chairs scraping above me, and I know exams are taking place in the rooms adjacent. Signs saying 'quiet please' in capital letters are everywhere. Noise seems to be a school wide issue that needs to be dealt with constantly. I hear teachers' adjacent going 'shhh'. It's cold, its silent, the space is unoccupied. A teacher shouts 'what are you doing? BEHAVE! YOU'RE IN YEAR 11!'

I anticipate how the teachers and children will disrupt the quietness in minutes. The contrast between this atmosphere and what's coming seems extreme – this quietness versus the chaos that will ensure.

Year 11 leaves the room adjacent shouting inaudible words. Noises come and go from above me and the hallway.

I hear the kids arriving outside in the hallway. They shout and scream, and push against the wall of the class. I am sat on the other side, and the wall literally bulges and moves as their bodies smash and bang against it. As time moves past the allocated class start time, I sense that the chaos of the group gets more intense. As institutional order breaks down, so the intensity of the children's unruliness increases. I have a sense of anxiety as no teacher has arrived yet. Again I may be the de facto teacher, the de facto authority figure, as in one of my first times with the PSE class.

I go out into the hallway with trepidation - the class is there, and the noise is incredible. Bodies moving, pushing, shoving, screaming, shouting. This aggression is intense, yet at the same time undirected, uncontrolled. It is not the intentional, malicious intention of one child deliberately hitting another. It is more like a force has been unleashed, due to the space the children occupy and the fact that class hasn't started and the teacher isn't present. The kids at the front (Jonathan, Phil) are obviously trying to stay away from this noise. Jonathan is small in stature and later says in an interview that he dislikes the pushing and shoving in the hallways between classes. It occurs to me that unruliness here is linked to space and time. The in-between areas and times allow for chaotic body movements.

I go to reception and tell them there is no teacher, they say they will find someone to teach them.

I come back and the kids are still pushing, shoving and chaotic. I tell them to come into the class. They come in and continue to be noisy. I make no attempt to silence them or teach them – I am not in a position to do this. I take my usual seat at the front of the class to the side and speak to the children there. After a little time a covering teacher comes in.

The covering teacher comes in and immediately lambasts the children for the noise levels. She shouts at the top of her voice to quieten them down. I feel a little like this is unfair on the children as it is the schools prerogative to provide supervision and teaching for them. She then uses me as a prop to tell the kids off. She says 'I can't believe you behaved like this in front of this gentleman' and says to me 'I'm sure you visit with a lot of schools and this is embarrassing'. I say 'no comment' as I don't know how to express my ambivalence. I feel weird at being used as a prop and authority figure to admonish the children. I feel as if the institution and its representative is deferring its own failings onto me and the children. John catches my eye and puts a finger to his lips, mock shushing. When she turns away I can't help a slight smile appear and John says quietly, 'he's laughing!'.

This is an example of many things – noise, temporality, the absence of the teachers body allowing chaos to occur, and systemic violence, the institution not fulfilling its basic requirements towards the children and then blaming the children for their failing.

I notice the kids talk about work sometimes and still get told off for talking.

This was an insane class – noise at max, kids out of control, no teacher present at the start of class. (Extract from field notes, 27th April 2015).

Though this is a long, extended extract, I felt it pertinent to present the whole, as this was a clear instance of institutional disorganisation feeding directly down into the *unruly atmosphere* and the actions of the children. Whilst I have presented the first part of the extract in the previous

chapter, showing how the lack of a covering teacher seemed to impact the unruliness in the corridor space, this extended extract shows the way that the school's disorganisation and failure to provide an adequate covering teacher in time for class to start had a direct impact on the children's noise and embodied unruliness when entering the classroom space. It also speaks to the unease I felt at becoming a de-facto authority figure, as in the absence of a teacher my adult status almost immediately put me in that position. Indeed, I suddenly was a gatekeeper to the classroom space itself, as Mrs Jones was not there to permit the children to enter the class, I was the one who implicitly had the authority to allow them in. I did not attempt to discipline or control them. I felt that this would be a betrayal of the rapport we had built up, and could also affect the research relationship going forward.

Once inside the classroom space, the noise and chaos continued, until the covering teacher arrived, who then proceeded to use me as a disciplinary prop in order to silence the now hysterical class? I did not appreciate being used in this way, and felt that the school was deferring its own organisational failings onto the class. By now, I was sympathising with the class, despite the chaos they had been causing. They had been let down by the school, and forgotten about, and it was only with my intervention in going to reception and telling them that there was no teacher present that any teacher appeared. If we recall the first extract of this chapter, this was not the first time this had happened in my presence - one of the first occasions I met the class, no teacher was present, and at this time I reported this to reception. This happened numerous times during my six months spent at the school, and taking into account that I did not observe every single class that this Year Eight group had, one can only imagine how often this kind of disorganisation and instability occurred in their day to day school lives.

What do these kind of instances mean for the class and the children's *spatial negotiations*? They mean that even within the most ordered, disciplinary space of the school (the class) there is inconsistency and instability. The children are told that there are myriad rules and timetable/academic expectations in the school, yet frequently these rules are not adhered to by the school organisation. This means more subjective and spatial instability for the children, more confusion, and more nomadic negotiations of space as they wonder where to go or what to do. In the absence of clarity, they behave chaotically, in an unruly way, feeding off the chaos of the school and manifesting it externally through noise and chaotic bodily movements. For the children such as Jonathan or Becky, who dislike the roughhousing and unruliness in the corridors and playground, these times (when they should be 'safe' in class) could be upsetting or distressing, as they are unexpectedly placed in a volatile situation where there is uncertainty about what to do.

From a researcher's perspective, this extract is key, as it was one of the moments when I most keenly empathised with the children, and felt what they must go through on a frequent

basis. I was also fairly weary of the disorganisation of the school at this point, as I was constantly coming up against obstacles when it came to arranging research spaces or times to conduct interviews and walking tours. Trying to carve out research space in the school at a regular time and place was difficult, and it was only with the assistance of individual teachers that I was able to conduct individual interviews (albeit during lunch times, taking time from the children, rather than the teachers). The school allowed me access but from there was not really able to assist me in the organisational elements of the research. My difficulties in these areas mirrored the children's experiences of disorganisation, instability, unruliness and nomadic negotiations of space. Often my wandering in the school as I went from different administrative and teaching staff to try and literally negotiate suitable spaces to conduct research seemed to mirror the nomadic *spatial negotiations* of the children during lunch times and break times. We were all trying to claim some space for ourselves in the school, for something other than teaching and learning, and the constant difficulty of doing this seemed particularly poignant to me.

I would now like to present the final fieldwork observation that I wrote. This extract links to the above extract in its themes of institutional disorganisation, chaotic spaces, and the parallels between my research experience and the children's school experiences. It is also a rather poignant and bittersweet observation for me personally to reflect on, as it was the last time I would be at the school and as you will see, my research experience did not end as I would have liked.

I arrive at Mrs Jones room at 1400. She is usually here but when I knock there is no answer. I tentatively enter the room and it is empty. I sit in silence in this room, waiting. I am concerned that she may be absent again, and this makes me anxious, as last time she was absent things became very chaotic and stressful.

I notice how easily institutional time breaks down. It's 1405, which is when class should start, but Mrs Jones isn't here, the kids aren't here. The porousness of time – time runs over, classes overlap, there's periods of silence and inactivity followed by periods of extreme activity and noise

I hear the class start congregating outside - their noise announces them.

Noise – someone shouts bang. The walls rumble behind me, I can feel the walls moving pushing against my back violently. Someone is pushing and banging against the wall. Kids shout things then a teacher comes out from another room to quiet them down. She shushes them and says 'Miss isn't in'. They have to stay outside until someone comes to cover. This happens frequently – feeling of instability, of chaos, of being forgotten about. I hear a child shouting 'AH AH THAT'S REALLY HARD!'

This space in time leads to chaos, unruliness, intense movement, and shouting. This breakdown in the system the order of the day. I just sit in the empty class while the class stands outside. I hear that they have to go to a different room.

No one sees me, no one comes to pay attention to me.

Similar to the kids, I am forgotten about and left to wander. I don't know where the class has gone. The chaos of the environment wears me down.

Is the school missing its duty of care on the kids?

I decide to leave. I don't know where the class has gone and I don't know who would know. This disorganisation leaves me weary. I am not intimidated by the children, but I am at times intimidated by the disorganisation and chaos that surrounds us. It is so hard to develop research relationships within this chaotic environment.

The feeling of leaving early reminds me of leaving school early, that feeling of liberation and relief I used to get as a teenager (Field notes extract, 22nd June 2015)

As is clear from this extract, the last time I ever saw the class and my participants (and the school for that matter), I did not even see them. In my mind, I had imagined getting up in front of the class, thanking them all for taking part, and possibly having a small question and answer session about the research and their experiences. In fact, I had emailed Mrs Jones previously to ask if I could do this during this class, and she had agreed. Prior to class, I was excited and a little nervous to make this speech, speak to the children and bring an end to the research.

Therefore, when I got to the class and found it empty, I became anxious. Anxious because yet another research plan had been disrupted, anxious because Mrs Jones was absent and I did not know what that meant for the class, and anxious because last time she was absent and I was present (the previous extract) it was very chaotic and I had to step in and become a de-facto authority figure. In light of my plan to speak to the class, I was very disappointed that neither they nor Mrs Jones was present, as I now did not know where the class would go or who would teach them. On top of that, as a researcher present in classes, it is useful to have teachers who are sympathetic to the research and will allow me time to speak to the class (which Mrs Jones was). In her absence, I felt how I imagine the children might feel: unsupervised, uncertain of my plans, and uncertain of my place, in the class and in the school. Could I speak, should I speak, should I go out into the corridor, should I follow them to their cover class? This breakdown in institutional organisation caused a flurry of anxious thoughts and questions in me, particularly as I was looking to bring the research to a close with a measure of formality and appreciation for the classes' participation. Once again, I am not being critical of Mrs Jones for being absent, in fact we might

imagine that her absence was potentially related to the high stress levels she may have been experiencing at the school. Rather, I am highlighting the way that the institution's disorganisation and failure to provide a cover teacher once again left the research process in a state of disrupted confusion.

In a similar way, we can see from the extract how the children were reacting to the absence of order. They shouted loudly, they banged against the wall, they screamed at each other. Of course, as an adult researcher, my reactions were different, but I could understand them reacting in this way. It is almost as if, when faced with the school's disorganisation and 'institutional unruliness', they reflected it back, descending into chaotic unruliness. Left 'in control' or without order, they lose control, as they are children, not adults, and they do not know what to do.

'No one sees me, no one comes to pay attention to me'. Reading back over this line, I feel the ways in which the disorganisation in the school blurred my subjective experience of researching in the school, often transporting me back to jagged flashbacks of adolescence. This final extract returns us to the 'nomadic negotiations of space' concept, as both myself and the children are left to wander the corridors, dislocated from each other, uncertain and unsure, wandering like the nomad through the material and discursive unruliness of the institution of the school.

I was never able to see the class again after this, despite my best efforts. The last week of summer term was broken up into exams, sports days, school trips and other unusual events, and the group that I followed was broken up also during these times. I was not able to negotiate a suitable time and space with the school where I could say goodbye to them, and I was not able to thank them for their participation in this research project. Once again, the institutional chaos and 'unruliness' placed barriers between us, and I was not able to wrap up the research in the way I would have liked, or the way that the children deserved.

This section intentionally draws on personal research reflections, as these extracts and the resulting analysis shows the ways in which my experience as a researcher mirrored and blurred with the experiences of the students. I struggled to win some space for myself as a researcher, just as they struggled to win some space for themselves in the school. I had to negotiate the *unruly atmosphere* in the school, and I nomadically negotiated space in the school, often wandering without clarity, trying to find someone who could tell me where I could go, and what spaces my participants and I could use to conduct research. I also saw the ways in which the institutional 'unruliness' and chaos fed into the overall *unruly atmosphere* in the school, and saw first-hand the ways in which breakdowns in school order intensified and contributed to the

children's chaotic and embodied unruliness in the spaces of the school, such as the corridors and the classrooms. Therefore, the emotional and personal tone to this final analysis section is not only intentional but necessary, as it is the section in which the parallels between my own experience and the children's experiences are the closest. Though these experiences could be stressful and anxiety inducing, they provided a rich seam of ethnographic data, and have been a key part of thematically analysing my data corpus.

6.4 Conclusions

This chapter brings the analysis into the final crucial school space: the classroom. The main section of the chapter focused on the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* in the school was present in the classroom, mapped through the phenomenon of classroom noise. The classroom was presented here as the 'eye of the storm' of both the *unruly atmosphere* and the children's 'nomadic negotiations of space'. The concept of *spatial negotiations* here was adapted, to look at *how* the classroom spaces were occupied by the students, rather than the previous focus on *what* spaces they chose to occupy. We can see the impact that teachers have on these negotiations, highlighted through the mapping of noise in various different classes at various different times. We saw the ways in which noise and unruliness were almost like a material force, a phenomenon not controlled by one individual or institution. Mrs Jones eloquently described the noise made by the group as a 'buzz', and this was how I attempted to show noise and unruliness in this chapter - as a material force created not only by the students in the school but also by teachers, spaces, discursive elements (such as the power of words like 'exam') and institutional disorganisation. All of these factors and more contribute to the creation and intensity of the *unruly atmosphere* in the school.

The ways in which different teachers and different classes attempt to deal with noise was key to this exploration - we can see the ways in which Ms Laurie attempts to almost harness the noisiness of the class, to varying degrees of success. We saw briefly the way that English was kept relatively calm. It is hard to say exactly *why* this class seemed to be the calmest, but it appeared that the consistency of rules, seating plans and overall expectations and tone was key to maintaining this calmness. We saw the ways in which the teachers' views of the class's behaviour could be very different from the children's own views of their behaviour, and indeed my own view as a researcher. This disparity in viewpoint and expectations could lead to confusion in the class as to what was appropriate behaviour, and it would appear that frequent changes in classroom rules and expectations could intensify the *unruly atmosphere* in the classroom space. This was particularly evident in Welsh classes, where (seemingly well-intentioned) attempts to bend the rules on noise levels in the form of learning games seemed to lead to confusion in the children regarding what was acceptable and what was not. The physiological and material elements of the

unruly atmosphere were highlighted during this analysis - the ways in which the bodies and voices of the students seemed unable to transition back to 'acceptable' levels of noise once they had gone beyond them (even if this movement beyond was sanctioned by the teachers).

What I am truly trying to build here, however, is an analytical picture of the myriad *spatial negotiations* that the children have to negotiate when it comes to the classroom space. As we saw in the last chapter, merely negotiating the in-between spaces of the corridors when travelling from class to class can be a fraught experience of dealing with physical unruliness. Once arriving at class, discursive and behavioural negotiations are the order of the day: understanding the teacher's expectations regarding behaviours, as well as knowing where to sit, who to sit with, when to speak, when not to speak, how loudly to speak, all form part of the *spatial negotiations* of the classroom. Though there were discursive elements and words that could overrule this confusion (such as the word exam) in general what I observed was a constantly changing set of rules and expectations from class to class. Overall, we can see a complex web of material-discursive *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in during their day-to-day school lives, and this analytical journey through those *spatial negotiations* helps us to see the different ways in which those negotiations are experienced. In this chapter, I have sought to develop on the theme of the *unruly atmosphere* in the school by highlighting how this manifests itself through the phenomena of noise in the classroom. I also sought to show how, though this unruliness may be typical of many secondary schools, there were elements that made Valley School's specific unruliness unique and intense. This was shown in the ways in which institutional disorder seemed to intensify the *unruly atmosphere* and chaos in the children and school. When analysing these elements, in the latter section of the chapter, I drew on my own personal research reflections as well as data extracts, emphasising the ways in which during these times I felt an empathy with the children's experiences. I showed how the challenges I faced in carving out some space for my research in the school shared similarities with the ways in which the children struggled to 'win some space' for themselves in the school, and the ways in which we were both at the whims of institutional disorder and dysfunction. Throughout this section, I used a more reflective, emotional and personal tone in order to display to the reader the ways in which my experiences ran parallel to those of the children. This culminated in the analysis of my final extract from my field notes, in which institutional dysfunction once again came between me and the children and stopped me from wrapping up the research experience in the way I would have liked. This final section posited a kind of 'institutional unruliness' entangled with the general *unruly atmosphere* in the school, and brings to a close the analysis of my data corpus.

The important thing to glean from this analysis chapter is that, whilst many of the extracts detail instances of disruptive classroom behaviour that could be found in many UK secondary

schools, taken as a whole and filtered through the analytical concepts I have developed (particularly the idea of an *unruly atmosphere*) they point to a specific atmosphere particular to Valley School. The idea of this concept is to ethnographically describe the ways in which the many micro and macro pressures that Valley School was under all blurred together to give rise to the palpable, and particular, *unruly atmosphere* that I encountered in the research site. The macro factors affecting this were the regional school policies and budget cuts, the institutional disorganisation and enforced closures, and the micro pressures of dealing with students from a variety of localities, in a deprived area of South Wales, with all of the complex social and pedagogical issues that come along with that particular student cohort. This analysis chapter should be seen in this light - as a way of seeing the ways in which macro pressures filter down into the teachers and students everyday school practices and interactions with each other, with space and with schooling.

There is also a need to consider the methodological implications and changes of this chapter. The data extracts included in the previous two analysis chapter were primarily taken from the qualitative data acquired from individual interviews, occasionally supported by field notes extracts. This chapter is almost completely drawn from ethnographic observations, written in class and later transcribed. That means there is a subtle difference in the extracts and the analysis of them. The data here was contingent on multiple factors: my observations of classroom activities, and my ability to write and reflect on them accurately. This means that as an ethnographic observer I was engaged in a consistent process of subjective selections (what to write down, when, and how) and later reflections on these selections (after class) and then further selections of which extracts to include and analyse in this chapter. It is also true that I am caught between the traditional reflexive ethnographic method and the post-human diffractive method during this chapter, particularly section 6.3. I was not able to synergise these methods, nor was I attempting to. However, I certainly feel that Barad's suggestion that "embodiment is a matter not of being specifically situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity" (Barad, 2008: 377) links up to the experiences of the pupils and myself in this section. The overlap in subjective experiences between myself as the researcher and the children as students is an example of this. My 'agency' as a researcher was limited, and coupled with the focus on space and affect gives me cause to reflect on the humanist concept of agency altogether. Unfortunately, I was not able to use a thorough post-human theoretical framework for this thesis. It still seems worthwhile to point out the ways in which the research experience could lend itself to post-human theory and analysis. I also drew on Gershon's (2013) ideas on sound and Anderson's (2009) research into atmospheres to explore the noise and *unruly atmosphere* present in this chapter.

Overall, these research encounters shape the thesis and particularly this chapter, because they placed me in a position similar (but not the same) as the children and allowed me to sympathise with their everyday experiences. The encounters I had during these classroom observations helped shape the focus on space as well as the development of the *unruly atmosphere* concept. The next chapter discusses the findings of this analysis process as a whole.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This conclusion brings together the preceding themes of this thesis, and attempts to answer the research questions posed in the introduction. It will assess the ways in which the analysis attempts to reflect the children's *spatial negotiations* through specific spaces within the school, and look at the ways in which the development of two key analytic concepts have elucidated and informed the data corpus used in this thesis. These two concepts are the 'nomadic negotiations of space' concept, used to describe the children's *spatial negotiations* around Valley School, and the idea that Valley School has a pervasive *unruly atmosphere* which informs, and is informed by, the prevailing institutional disorganisation and regional educational policy contexts. These larger institutional and policy contexts, it is argued in the final analysis chapter, inform the children's micro *spatial negotiations* and the *unruly atmosphere* that I describe throughout the thesis. This chapter will consider these findings in conjunction with the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, particularly Massey's (2005) propositions on space, as well as Massumi's (2002) work on affect and the notion of the 'shape of space'. Previously mentioned research, such as Anderson's work on atmospheres' (2009) Taylor's diffractive analysis of space and objects in an educational setting (2013) and Gershon's work on sound also serve to place these findings in a realm where the material, sensory and affective elements of space and gender are foregrounded.

After systematically going through the research questions and understanding how the thesis attempts to answer them, the final part of the conclusion offers up suggestions for theory, research, policy and practice, based on the specific spatial perspective that this thesis offers. The focus that this thesis has taken, and the change in the research focus that occurred during the early stages of fieldwork, has potentially offered up a new way to understand the everyday experiences and pressures of 12-13 year old students in this particular region of Wales. This focus on the material-spatial components of these children's lives in school was discovered organically, through ethnographic explorations of these children's lives, and despite challenges during fieldwork I was able to piece together a picture of how and why these *spatial negotiations* were important to the children in this class. I was also able to understand the ways in which these 'nomadic negotiations of space' were entangled in the children's experiences of gender and well-being in the school. I was also able to observe the ways in which their engagement in the "struggle to win some space for themselves" (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006) was undermined by constant uncertainty, instability and the *unruly atmosphere* that pervaded the school. During analysis, I drew parallels between the experiences of my participants, myself and the theoretical grounding of this thesis, particularly Massey's 3 propositions on space (Massey, 2005). The way that Massey conceptualises space, as formed by interrelations, the political and the distinct

trajectories of multiplicities, has had a profound impact on this thesis, and during these findings I will draw conclusions in reference to this theoretical framework.

7.2 Research questions and findings:

This section of the conclusions directly addresses the research questions set out at the beginning of the thesis. I will draw on the analysis chapters primarily to answer these questions. Following this I will move into more in-depth discussions of elements of these findings. This will include looking at the implications that the findings of this thesis has for education policy and practice. They will also include a further exploration of the findings on gender and space contained in this thesis, as well as the potential use of more explicit post-human frameworks and methodologies for further research on space and schooling. I will now go on to address the research questions directly.

How do Year Eight (12-13) children experience space in a South Wales secondary school? To what extent do these spatial experiences inform their experiences of gender and well-being in school?

The main research question above attempts to cover all of the elements involved in this thesis: school space, the interplay between gender and space and well-being and space, in the specific region of South Wales. Rather than attempting to answer this broad question directly, I will attempt to answer the sub-questions directly, and then summarise these answers into a broader conclusion that answers this main question. These sub-questions directly relate to elements of the broader research question, and by addressing the research questions in this way I can avoid repetition and delve deeper into the different elements of the research questions and thesis.

To what extent are children involved in an ongoing process of *spatial negotiations* during the course of the school day?

This opening sub-question attempts to introduce the focus on space of this thesis, and to ensure that focus is justified: to clarify that space and *spatial negotiations* do play a central role in the children's everyday lives at school. We can see from all three of the analysis chapters (and from the decision I took to change the research focus) that the children *are* involved in an ongoing process of *spatial negotiations* during the course of the school day. Many of the elements of these negotiations are explored in the analysis chapters – from the complex *spatial negotiations* that take place at break and lunch times, to the unruliness that takes place in the 'in-between' (Clarke, 2010) spaces of the corridors when moving between classes, to the micro-*spatial negotiations* and sensory impact of the classroom spaces.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I focused primarily on the *spatial negotiations* that the children were involved in at break-times and lunchtimes. Though only taking up approximately 50 minutes of

each school day, the spaces the children inhabited during these times were important to the children's lives. They affected their gendered identities (discussed in a later sub-question) and their sense of stability and well-being in the school. In an attempt to analyse the data surrounding these *spatial negotiations*, I developed a descriptive concept through which to view these experiences: the 'nomadic negotiations of space' concept. This concept allowed me to view the children's *spatial negotiations* with clarity and insight.

This concept was developed with reference to research on childhood and space (Jenks, 2005; Tamboukou and Ball, 2006) and with specific reference to Tamboukou and Ball's chapter describing the educational transitions of young black women in Britain. They describe these subjects as 'nomadic', a reference to Braidotti's post-human theorisation of the 'nomadic subject'. These reference points were useful, as they provided a conceptual and descriptive lens through which to view the research participants' *spatial negotiations* throughout the school day. However, my use of the term 'nomad' in this thesis is primarily descriptive and conceptual, rather than an overt use of post-human theories on nomadic subjectivities (though these could potentially inform future analysis or research on the same subject). The concepts of *spatial negotiations* and 'nomadic negotiations of space' are founded on theoretical understandings of space as dynamic, political, always-under-construction, and draw from Massey (2005) and Thrift (2003) as their theoretical bedrock.

The concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' highlights the instability of the children's *spatial negotiations* in the school, particularly during break times and lunchtimes. At these times they have a degree of choice as to where they want go in the school: at the same time, this element of choice is undermined and informed by myriad social, environmental and institutional factors which generate an instability in their spatial decisions (the interrelations and distinct multiple trajectories of space, highlighted by Massey). I describe the children as being involved in a process of "struggling to win some space for themselves" (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 258) in the school. I used examples from interview data and field observations to focus on specific children and groups of children and the ways they experienced and negotiated space in this institutional climate. We saw how Becky articulated the differences between those who spent time inside or outside, and the ways in which she perceived the outside spaces of the playground and the sports pitch as aggressive spaces where fighting and physical aggression were prominent. Through the use of mobile methods (the walking tour) I was able to glean an understanding of where the children spent time during their breaks. Through this period (as well as follow up interviews) I was introduced to some of the different spaces in the school that children spent time in: the sport pitch, the playground, the memorial gardens, the music room, and the canteen. We saw from Becky's insights the ways in which the inside space of the music room was important to

some children, particularly (though not exclusively) girls, as an alternative space away from the unruliness (perceived or real) of the outside spaces. We also saw the ways in which this space of the music room was subject to constant tension and instability - how other children from other years might usurp the claim that Becky and her friends had to the music room, how this space was only available at the whim of a generous teacher, and therefore may be removed at any time without warning or consultation (potentially). These insights from this one student opened up the idea that the children in Valley School are involved in an ongoing attempt to claim certain spaces for themselves, during break times and lunchtimes. These claims that they have to certain spaces are beset by instability, unruliness and institutional policies, yet they seem important to the children. In some respects, the spatial choices that the children make during these times may have an important subjective role to play for these children, particularly in relation to their well-being (and other facets of subjectivity and identity). They provide comfort, familiarity, a social space, possibly a safe space (or an exciting, dangerous one) and inform other elements of the children's identities inside school. These choices inform their social practices and their sense of self. One of these key elements was gender, and the next sub-question goes on to address that in more detail.

How do girls and boys experience gender in different spaces in the school? To what extent do different school spaces inform students' gendered subjectivities?

In answering this question I draw on the second analysis chapter. This chapter concerned itself with the ways in which spaces could have a 'gendered' component to them, and the ways in which gender and space are entangled in the children's lives. As Massey notes, "gender relations vary over space" (Massey, 1994: 178). We saw how, for the girls particularly, the spaces they chose to occupy during breaks had an impact on their gendered selves. The ways in which Becky expressed a dislike for all outside spaces, and a preference for spending time in the inside space of the music room, were based on fears surrounding the physical unruliness and proliferation of sports and aggression outside. Yet, this was placed into contrast when compared with the preferences of another group of girls – Stacy, Joanne and Emma. These girls explained that they enjoyed being outside at lunchtimes, indeed referencing the constraining nature of the buildings and the environment within them. They found the school buildings and the spaces within them too constraining and restrictive, and complained about the heat in the English room in the interview I conducted with them. Stacy articulated her enjoyment of being outside by stating that outside '*you have room to chill*'.

This group of girls (Stacy, Joanne and Emma) provided an interesting counterpoint to Becky's extremely negative views on the outside spaces, and also provided information and insights into the other spaces girls occupy within the school, and the ways in which those groups

are viewed by other girls. They explain that some girls '*just hang out in the toilets*' and had a palpable sense of dislike regarding these girls, though they did not explain exactly why they felt this. This idea that certain kinds of femininity were being displayed in the choices of spaces that girls spent time in was further developed during the interview with Tracy and Sarah, who both enjoyed being outside at breaks and explained their dislike of the girls who spent time in the space of the music room. They felt that '*the girls normally go in the music room, or stay in the canteen*'. Their sense of 'typical' girl behaviour was that girls wanted to stay inside, to be in the canteen or the music room, and not outside. This also gave further credence to the sense that there was a tangible (yet fluid) division between those girls who spent time in the outside spaces of the school, and those girls who remained inside. Tracy and Sarah seemed to seek to defy the idea of the "passive schoolgirl" (Stanley, 1986) whose physical movement is restricted and who is encouraged to remain complaint, quiet and obedient. This idea of passive femininity is critiqued and illuminated by the focus on space in this thesis – we can see the decisions and negotiations inherent in the girls' decisions on space, which feed into their gendered selves. Tracy and Sarah explain how they felt that the inside spaces that they felt some girls frequented were '*boring*', and they Tracy states how she felt being outside was '*better*' than being inside, '*cos you can like move round*'. Tracy and Sarah's desire to spend time in the outside spaces of the school was directly linked to their sense of physicality and movement; they wanted large open spaces where they could run and move their bodies around. This links back to Joanna, Stacy and Emma's interview where they describe enjoying being away from the school buildings. To some students, the inside spaces were constraining and restrictive: tight interior spaces, filled with other children, which could be too hot or too cold at any one time. For the other girls (such as Becky, or Rachel) the inside spaces provided sanctuary, comfort and safety away from the unruly physicality of the playground and sports pitches.

However, this division of girls who spent time inside and girls who preferred outside spaces was complicated by some of the girls' comments on spending time outside. This was particularly true in the case of Tracy and Sarah. Whilst they talked up the virtues of being outside (more space to move around) they also discussed the ways in which being outside could be hazardous, and the ways in which the outside spaces were dominated by male sporting activities. Sarah and Tracy note that the boys are playing rugby and the ball might hit them in the head if they are outside. This links into the idea (developed later in the chapter) that the sports pitches and football fields are seen as male spaces, and that the boys have access to spaces which are seen as more legitimately 'theirs'. Therefore, for the girls who do like to be outside, this preference is not unproblematic. There were few, if any, examples of girls playing sports and break times and lunchtimes - the girls had to hover around the boys activities, they could not legitimately claim the outside sporting spaces as their own. To some extent the girls experiences

of space were more 'nomadic' than the boys, although only slightly. They did not have the same amount of 'legitimate' spaces that they could claim as their own, and therefore they had to attempt to "recreate their homes everywhere" (Tamboukou and Ball, 2006: 254). This chapter, then, developed the concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' even further, and complicated it through the addition of gender conceptually. When viewing the students' experiences of space through a gendered lens, we can see the ways in which their nomadic attempts to claim spaces for themselves are informed by ideas of gender and masculinity/femininity.

Chapter 5 also discussed the ways in which the boys experience space, primarily drawing on the interviews conducted with Phil, Matt and Drew, and their experiences of space not only in the school but in their locality too. All three boys expressed an interest in spending time on the sports field, and all three had an interest in sports. However, the specific space of the sports pitch was complicated in their views depending on spatial, temporal and contextual differences. I introduced here the idea of the sports pitch as a 'portable' or 'universal' space, in that it is a space which exists outside of the school in the locality, in local parks, and in organised sporting venues in the surrounding localities and regions. This was because, when discussing this space, the boys pointed out how there were differences in the atmosphere of the sports pitch depending on these variations of space and context. Matt and Drew discussed how they had witnessed aggression and violence on the sports pitch, but whilst playing football for their local team, not in the school sports pitch. They described how they had seen adult football coaches fighting each other in this context, and how football matches could occasionally spill over into mass brawls. They went on to discuss how in these scenarios, injury and aggression were something to be 'used to' and how a competitive, organised context to sporting events made them more intense and aggressive. They provided a counterpoint to some of the negative views of space in Valley School, by noting how when they played football on the school sports pitch at break times, with friends, it was a far more casual and fun atmosphere than when they occupied other sports pitches. I drew on Frosh *et al.*'s suggestion that male relationships and masculine practices in education "need to be seen as gendered practices which are relational, contradictory and multiple" (Frosh *et al.*, 2003: 84-85). This description serves to move beyond reductive binaries or concepts of a 'crisis in masculinity' and show the complex ways in which masculinities can play out in the school (albeit in a small fashion).

All three boys expected that sporting activities would come with an expectation of physical aggression and injury. Indeed, Phil described how he constantly was injured in rugby, but that he did not mind it and 'liked running into people'. Phil provided an interesting insight into the ways in which students might experience space and place *outside* of the school, and how *spatial negotiations* can spill out from the school into the locality. His description of his previous

experiences in Quarry Town and Quarry School, where he experienced violent assault, bullying and intimidation, provided another interesting counterpoint to the ways in which children experienced space in Valley School. Phil's *spatial negotiations* had taken place on a larger scale than the other children: his defining spatial change and spatial negotiation was moving house and school from Quarry Town to Valley Town and Valley School. For him, the place and spaces in Quarry Town and Quarry School were all potentially dangerous, unsafe spaces where he described being 'a target' for bullying and violence. He described how he enjoyed Valley School because it was smaller (earlier telling me how his previous school was a merged super school) and felt safer. One wonders how Phil must have felt upon hearing that Valley School was due to be closed and merged with another school in just the way his previous school had been. I would have liked to have done more research into the links between school, local and regional spaces, however the scope of the ethics framework of this study combined with the challenges in conducting fieldwork in the school did not allow for this.

We can say that different spaces do inform the children's gendered subjectivities, and that this relationship is a dynamic and fluid one. In this sense, we return to Massey's conceptualisation of space as 'dynamic' and not an inert, fixed conceptualisation. The children changed the spaces they occupied at different temporal junctures, and the spaces changed the children. This was particularly evident when considering gender. We can also see the ways in which the material meets the discursive when considering gendered spaces. This is evident in the ways in which discourses around passivity, movement, safety and community changed the view of a key space such as the music room, which to some girls (like Becky) provided safety, community and familiarity, whereas to others (such as Tracy and Sarah) it was a place of boredom and physical constraint. Discourses surrounding the legitimacy of activities in specific spaces also interacted with the materiality of those spaces. The sports pitches, with their specifically measured boundaries and goalposts, were materially set-up for specific sporting activities, and these activities then interacted with further discourses surrounding gender and sport e.g. boys and men play football and rugby, and therefore these spaces are 'for' them. The girls who sought to spend time outside, however, had to navigate and negotiate these activities, spending time on the margins (literally and figuratively) of the boys activities. Space and gender interact in a material-discursive fashion in the school, dynamically adapting and informing the other depending on the re-iteration of certain social practices within specific spaces.

How can the experience of students' everyday lives in Valley School be characterised?

The characterisation of students' lives in Valley School is primarily seen through the use of the descriptive concept of the *unruly atmosphere*. The idea of the *unruly atmosphere* present in Valley School was introduced in the first analysis chapter, and runs through all three chapters.

This was a concept developed in conjunction with my ethnographic experiences in the school, as well as research reflections in light of the experiences I was witnessing and having within the school. I also drew on literature surrounding affect (Massumi, 2002) and atmospheres (Anderson, 2009). Anderson's notion that "to attend to affective atmospheres is to learn to be affected by the ambiguities of affect/emotion, by that which is determinate and indeterminate, present and absent, singular and vague" (Anderson, 2009: 77) informed the formulation and use of the *unruly atmosphere* concept. The idea of an *unruly atmosphere* existing in Valley School was informed by both macro institutional, local and regional chaos and micro-level unruliness within the school environment on a day-to-day basis. This relates back to Massey's suggestion that we "recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (Massey, 2005: 9). For Valley School students, the global (or macro) spatial and political chaos ran through to the 'intimately tiny' interactions of the children's daily lives. I used this concept in an attempt to capture the practices that occurred that were not as extreme as violence (though some instances included violence) yet included physical aggression and the collision of bodies. It also captures the sensory intensity of the school: the noise and physical chaos of moving through the corridors from class to class, for example, as well as institutional chaos, staff absences, falling numbers, lack of teaching cover, and a general sense that things may not be noticed or could be overlooked.

This descriptive concept is used in conjunction with the 'nomadic negotiations of space' concept, as the children find themselves negotiating space within this *unruly atmosphere*. One of the sections of the thesis that deals specifically with this unruliness is the section in Chapter 5, where I discuss the 'in-between' space of the corridors. The corridors in the school, during the times between classes, became a sensory overload of unruliness, with a mass of bodies pushing, shoving, shouting and screaming their way through them. These periods only lasted 5 or 10 minutes, yet were very overwhelming, for myself and the children, though some children perhaps enjoyed the hurly burly of these events. I drew here on Hurdley's research into corridors. She states that "corridors matter. Too often invoked as iconic, intangible metaphors, the presence of corridors as cultural materials can be forgotten" (Hurdley, 2010: 45). I drew on Hurdley's suggestion that by focusing on 'corridor cultures' one can attend to "material, spatialised, contingent practices that slide away unseen and unheard beneath the buzzing repetition of metaphor, icon and cliché" (Hurdley, 2010: 46). The 'nomadic negotiations of space' that occurred during these periods were slightly different from the negotiations of space the children experienced during breaks; in the corridors between classes, the *spatial negotiations* were not about *where* to be (as both starting point and end point were already defined by the school timetable) but *how* to behave when getting there. Tracy and Sarah observed that moving between classes could be chaotic, particularly in the small thoroughfare near the history class,

and that physical aggression was an obstacle that occasionally needed to be negotiated (Tracy describes being ‘pushed to the floor’ on a number of occasions). This links up with Jonathan’s individual interview, where he struggles to define the physical unruliness that occurs during these times in the corridors:

Jonathan: Well, well when we have to line up in corridors they’re always barging and fighting, well not fighting but they’re always – getting on my nerves mostly (Extract from individual interview with Jonathan, 12th May 2015)

As noted in analysis, Jonathan struggles to define the unruliness that takes place in the corridors – at first he says that the children are always ‘barging and fighting’ but then he backtracks, and says ‘well not fighting’. It is not fighting in the traditional sense, nor would I exactly define these instances as violence. Observing instances like this helped to change the research focus of this thesis, and assisted in developing the concept of Valley School’s *unruly atmosphere*. This descriptive concept helps to describe the practices that occur in the corridors and in the school, which both the children and I struggled to articulate. The *unruly atmosphere* is present in many elements of the school day, but flares up at predictable and re-iterated trigger points and temporal junctures. The movement between classes is one of these trigger points. Atmospheres, as Anderson suggests, are both palpable and indefinable. They are sensory, affective experiences, and the *unruly atmosphere* emanated from the children’s bodies, their vocal chords, their personalities, but also was drawn up of something greater than just those elements – it drew on the materiality of the school, the stresses of the staff, the discourses around the potential school closure. The *unruly atmosphere* is borne of sensory, material and discursive tensions.

The other part of the thesis that deals explicitly with the *unruly atmosphere* in Valley School is the last analysis chapter (Chapter 6). This chapter attempts to take the reader into the final unexplored space of the school – the classroom. It tracks the existence and manifestations of the *unruly atmosphere* in the classroom, by focusing on noise, movement and the relationship between teachers and students within the class. As noted in this chapter, the tracking of *spatial negotiations* within the spaces of the classrooms is behavioural; I am not tracking what space they inhabit, but how they inhabit it. This behavioural element is part of the children’s *spatial negotiations*, and by analysing behaviour through classroom observations I was able to track the *unruly atmosphere* within the classroom environment.

Part of negotiating the *unruly atmosphere* in the classrooms, for the children, is negotiating the demands of the teaching staff. The teaching staff, in turn, also grapple with controlling the *unruly atmosphere* in classes, and these struggles at maintaining order are infused

and informed by micro *spatial negotiations* in class. I used noise to track the *unruly atmosphere* in the classrooms, as noise was a corollary for order (or chaos) and misbehaviour around the school and in class. The quieter the class, the ‘better’ behaved it seemed to be (for the teachers at least). I drew on Gershon’s (2013) work on sound for this section, and his notion that “while at one level sounds “are,” their interpretation and how they are utilized is inexorably linked to questions of power” (Gershon, 2013: 2). This was certainly true in the classrooms of Valley School.

What I struck upon in this chapter is the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* in the school was a dynamic, fluid, interpersonal essence that was almost akin to a material force (and often expressed through material, sensory sensations, such as movement and noise). This description may lend itself to a post-humanist analysis. My supervisory team and I considered applying a Baradian framework, using agential-realism (Barad, 2008) to analyse this data. Indeed, many of the early drafts of these chapters explicitly used Barad and post-humanist theory to analyse the data corpus. However, over time it became clear that it was not possible for my supervisors and myself to conduct a competent analysis using these theories. This was partly due to the fact I had not included these theoretical elements in the original project design, and so I was attempting to use these theories after research had been conducted, without using the appropriate diffractive methodology to conduct research. It was also partly due to the fact that myself and my supervisors were relative newcomers to the work of Karen Barad and post-humanist theory, and therefore did not feel confident in using these theoretical frameworks wholesale. However, I do feel that the ethnographic and analytic concepts used draw attention to the material dimensions of the *unruly atmosphere*, and capture its mysterious character – pervasive, palpable but elusive and hard to pin down. Though I describe the tensions between ethnography and post-humanism in Chapter 3 (and worked within these tensions for much of the writing up period), these tensions do not mean that post-humanist reflections on space, materiality and subjectivity would be irrelevant or unusable when considering the data collected. Rather, a false synthesis of ethnography and post-humanism would not be achievable within this thesis (or perhaps, any thesis).

It is clear that the material force of the *unruly atmosphere* was something the children had to negotiate. However, they also informed it – it was their increases in noise and movement that would signify a flare up of unruliness. I also noted in this chapter the ways in which differences in teaching styles and methods could also bring about an outbreak of unruliness in class, with specific reference to the ‘mobile phone game’ played by the trainee teacher in Welsh. During this game, objects music sound and movement were all used to play a learning game with the children, but as increases in movement and sound were permitted by the teacher, so too was the potential for the *unruly atmosphere* to increase in intensity, and spill out into disorder and

disobedience. The children, in negotiating and contributing to the *unruly atmosphere*, had to deal with varying degrees of permitted and forbidden activities within such an atmosphere. Moving from the extreme unruliness of the corridors into the sharply contrasting ordered space of the classroom was challenging for the children and teachers, as was the varying degrees of sound and movement allowed by different teachers in different classes. Here we see how the interpretation of behaviour, particularly sound and noise, has implicit power relations (Gershon, 2013).

The *unruly atmosphere* and the children's *spatial negotiations* were linked, in both the spaces they chose to occupy and how they occupied those spaces. The final research question looks at the way that institutional disorganisation and regional educational policy impact the children's *spatial negotiations*, and the ways in which the *unruly atmosphere* of the school can be seen in its institutional structures and troubles, as well as in the regional educational picture in South Wales.

To what extent does institutional disorganisation and regional educational policy affect the *spatial negotiations* that pupils are involved in?

The answers to this question are primarily found at the end of Chapter 4 (the first analysis chapter) and Chapter 6 (the final analysis chapter). The institutional issues surrounding Valley School began before I arrived and continued after I left the school to conduct research. It had been closed for an extended period of time prior to my entering the school, and affected the class I conducted research with as their first year in Valley School was actually spent at a different campus (Hillside campus) whilst the issues at Valley School were dealt with. This meant that, in a very real and literal way, issues within the very space and structure of the school impacted the children's *spatial negotiations* right from the moment they moved up to secondary school. They were expected to negotiate the spaces of a temporary campus, then had to acclimatise and further negotiate the spaces of Valley School in their second year. This meant that *spatial negotiations* were occurring on a macro institutional level as well on a micro, day-to-day level. These negotiations will continue for the children who participated in this research when Valley School closes, and again find space for themselves in a new institutional environment. We can see the ways in which institutional disorganisation and regional educational policy (including the proliferation of school closures in the semi-rural South Wales valleys) affected the *spatial negotiations* that the children are involved in.

I also analysed the ways in which the everyday disorganisation of the Valley School impacted the children's *spatial negotiations*, and drew parallels between my own difficulties in finding space to conduct research within the school. I too was involved in *spatial negotiations* within Valley School: I was attempting to find my way in an unknown environment, and carve out and claim spaces for myself and my participants much in the same way that the children

attempted to claim space for themselves in the school. I also noted the ways in which institutional disorganisation (such as the failure to provide covering teachers when staff were absent) impacted on the spatial and behavioural negotiations that the children and I were involved in. Indeed, I used an example where the absence of a covering teacher directly impacted the *spatial negotiations* and *unruly atmosphere* of the children - when I observed the intense flaring up of physical and sonic unruliness outside Welsh, when Mrs Jones was absent and no covering teacher had been provided, the children began to exhibit even further unruliness whilst waiting outside the Welsh class. The lack of clarity and order seemed to incite the children's unruly behaviour further, and I was placed in a position of de-facto teacher and supervisor. This shows the way that institutional disorganisation (the failure to provide cover staff) directly impacted the children's *spatial negotiations* and experiences, as well as my own experiences as a researcher. This example also speaks to Massey's idea that "space is the product of interrelations" (Massey, 2005: 9) and that global, macro spatial changes impact the everyday tiny spatial environments of humans.

This research question and its accompanying answer shows how macro institutional and regional policy factors impact on the children's' day-to-day lives, and their experiences and *spatial negotiations* within Valley School. This allows us to consider the ways in which their well-being might be affected within the school by the myriad *spatial negotiations* they are involved in, and brings us in to the specificities of Valley School and the region of South Wales. As noted in the analysis chapters, many of the *spatial negotiations* that the children were involved in in Valley School would be taking place in almost all secondary schools in Wales and the UK. However, what was specific about these experiences, in this school, locality and region, were the ways in which disorganisation at an institutional level, and proliferation of school closures and merges at a policy level, exacerbated and exaggerated the nature of these everyday negotiations. The concept of 'nomadic negotiations of space' becomes even more valid when we consider the ways in which these children will have been shuttled around by the end of their secondary school careers. They will have attended 3 different campuses by the time they take their GCSE's, and this must have an impact on their well-being and stress levels. Whilst I would have liked to have conducted further research with the children on just how these changes affected them, the change in research focus coupled with the sensitive nature of the schools' challenges made this impossible at this juncture. However, this could be an avenue for further research on spatiality and *spatial negotiations* in schools.

7.3 Spatiality, Materiality and Educational Research

There is potential for the analysis contained in this thesis to contribute to educational research and academic understandings of the interplay between space, materiality and children's everyday

lives in schools. This work has not taken place in a vacuum, indeed, the new materialist special issue of *Gender and Education* (*Gender and Education*, Vol 25, Issue 6: 2013, eds. Taylor and Ivinson) provided many papers and inspirations as to the ways in which considerations of materiality and space provide new directions for analysis of gender and other social issues within the school environment. Particularly focusing on papers by Taylor (2013) and Hillevi and Palmer (2013) this thesis has used these papers and their insights, amongst others, as a way to reframe the importance of space and materiality within the school environment. Although I have not conducted a wholesale post-human or new materialist analysis of my data corpus, the importance placed on space and the materiality of the school by these works (and others like them) provided a jumping off point for my ethnographic exploration of students' *spatial negotiations* within Valley School. It is my hope that other academics and researchers may use the concepts in this thesis as interesting ways to reframe the student experience. When we consider the material as well as the subjective, we in some small way attempt to move beyond dualistic notions of mind and body, and this attempt is informed by Massey's theories of space which underpin this thesis. These same binary divisions, she argues, have also been used in traditional, conventional theorisations of space, which see space as "bounded, as in various ways a site of an authenticity, as singular, fixed and unproblematic in its identity" (Massey, 1994: 5). With this thesis I aim, in some small way, to disrupt these notions of space as a singular unproblematic container for human subjectivities, and to reframe and establish "the inherent dynamism of the spatial" (Massey, 1994: 4). This disruption is not purely an abstract, theoretical exercise. It has important implications for the way we perceive the social relations of children in schools, particularly in regard to gender and other elements of subjectivity and identity, and it is my attempt to use these new concepts (such as *spatial negotiations*, or nomadic negotiations of space) as ways to reframe the micro spatial practices of children in schools. This attempt is informed by ethnographic observations of the practices occurring at Valley's school, the centrality of space to the children's everyday lives, and the ways in which space and gender are inform each other.

By seeing the children's experiences through a spatial prism, I have been able to glean not only interesting insights into their everyday gendered practices within the school, but also to see the ways in which macro structures (such as the school institution, or regional educational policy) are played out over a spatial and geographic canvas. These macro structures affect the macro and micro spatial realities of the children in Valley School: from changing school campuses during the enforced temporary school closure, through to the decision to actually close Valley School completely. By using spatial concepts as a prism through which to view the children's experiences at Valley School, I have been able to see how macro institutional and policy pressures affect and trickle down to their everyday micro spatial practices. The *unruly atmosphere* of Valley School could be applied to the education picture of the whole South Wales region. This region is

undergoing significant redevelopment and change, with many rural schools being closed and merged into large super schools, and this chaotic and unstable landscape is directly affecting the children's experiences. The spatial lens has helped to see this interaction more clearly, and may assist other researchers in drawing the same links between policy, practice and everyday school lives. I will go on to discuss the implications of the findings for policy and practice below.

7.4 Suggestions for Policy and Practice in South Wales

This section deals with the potential implications for educational policy and practice in South Wales. The region is undergoing many changes in its educational structure, particularly in the semi-rural areas of the Valleys. These areas have for years had small secondary schools serving the local areas, but over the past ten years the proliferation of school closures and school mergers have been accompanied by the rise of so called 'super schools'. These super schools are primarily defined by their large size and large student populations, and often serve a disparate variety of semi-rural localities, with students often being expected to travel long distances to attend school. For children in this area, these changes must affect their everyday lives, and the everyday *spatial negotiations* they are involved in when attending school. As we can see from the data presented in this thesis, the children in Valley School are engaged in myriad *spatial negotiations* every day, and these macro institutional and regional changes only amplify and exacerbate their experiences. It is relatively rare to have research detailing what it is feels like to attend a school experiencing the kind of pressures that Valley School has been experiencing. This thesis aims to bring these insights to bear, and they are worth taking into consideration when designing Welsh education policy.

Therefore, policy makers may wish to take into account the micro, everyday experiences of the children when it comes to school closures and school mergers. Though the Welsh government is committed to the 21st century schools policy (Welsh Government, 2011) and to creating improved learning spaces for children in Wales, they must take into account the upheaval experienced on the ground by those students whose schools are closing and merging when making their decisions. They could also take into account the gendered nature of school spaces when constructing and designing new schools, and understand how boys may have access to more 'legitimate' spaces such as the playgrounds and sports pitches. Perhaps ideas could be generated on how to create comfortable and appropriate spaces for girls and for mixed groups in schools, and consistent institutional and regional policies on school spaces would be a way to improve children's well-being inside schools in South Wales.

In terms of education practice, perhaps it is pertinent to point out to practitioners the ways in which children are involved in *spatial negotiations* during the school day, and the ways in which even breaks and lunches are fraught with multiple changing *spatial negotiations*. Spatial

instability defined my participants' spatial experiences and negotiations, and perhaps by viewing children's experiences in schools from a spatial perspective, practitioners can understand the pressures children are under beyond simple behaviour and attainment. This thesis aims to shed light on the everyday pressures of school life by using an innovative and data-led spatial perspective that helps to understand the material-discursive elements of children's school lives.

7.5 Potential Future Work (Post-Humanist Analysis)

Future research on space and schooling could benefit from a post-human theoretical framework. As Lyttleton-Smith shows (Lyttleton-Smith, 2017) in her analysis of an early-years classroom, *spatial negotiations* and spatial arrangements can be crucial to the subjectivities of children in schools, particularly when it comes to gender. There is a strong body of literature that uses post-human frameworks to innovate and analyse educational experiences of students in the UK and South Wales (Taylor, 2013, Renold and Iverson, 2013, Lyttleton-Smith 2017) and this theoretical perspective allows for a consideration of the ongoing material iterations in students' lives, and the ways in which these iterations are informed by materiality as well as discourse. Lyttleton-Smith's (2017) use of Barad's agential-realist framework allowed her to focus on the ways in which the physical environment of the classroom had "an observable influence on early childhood gender experiences" (Lyttleton-Smith, 2017: 2). In a similar way, the focus on space in this thesis has shown how spaces and *spatial negotiations* can have a gendered component, and how children's gendered selves are tied to, and informed by, the material environments and spaces they find themselves in.

I would have liked to have more explicitly used a post-human theoretical framework to explore children's experiences in Valley School. Indeed, I attempted to apply this analytical framework to the data contained in my data corpus in previous drafts of this thesis. However, my knowledge of post-human theory is in its infancy, and my supervisors, who are not experts in the area, were not in a position to help me develop my thinking to doctoral level. This, coupled with the change in research focus during the fieldwork, meant that accurately applying this theoretical perspective was not possible at this stage. However, future analysis of this data could incorporate a more thorough understanding of what post-human theory could bring to understandings of schooling and spatiality, and further research could perhaps benefit from an explicit focus on space using a post-human framework to help generate and analyse data.

7.6 Final Thoughts

This thesis, from research design to fieldwork to analysis, has undergone many iterations, revisions and changes in focus. However, the primary inspiration for the project remains: to better understand the ways in which children in South Wales experience their lives in school, with

a strong emphasis on social and personal factors (gender and well-being). The thesis attempts to contribute to the tradition of school-based ethnographic work in the UK by focusing on children's experiences of school space. This was a data-led change in focus, and the centrality of space to children's experiences in Valley School may not have become clear without the openness and adaptability that the ethnographic method allows for. It has become clear throughout this process that materiality and spatiality play a central part in my participants' daily lives, and it has also become clear that the *spatial negotiations* they are involved in are informed by material-discursive constructions of gender, safety, movement, order, and discipline. It also became clear during this research that the character of the institution has an impact on students' *spatial negotiations*: the *unruly atmosphere* I observed in Valley School was linked to the institutional pressures (budgetary, structural, political) that Valley School was undergoing at the time. Therefore we need to understand how children in under-pressure schools, that may be threatened with closure, are amongst the most vulnerable in the UK school pupil population. For these children, the instability and uncertainty they experience on a micro everyday level is writ large in the macro uncertainty and changing landscape of Welsh school policies and Welsh education. We must not forget that these children have a right to a consistent level of well-being just as all others do, and that schools like Valley School are often situated in localities and regions where socio-economic pressures are even more intense than other areas in Wales and the UK. Though long term the 21st century schools policy scheme is attempting to bring about positive change in Welsh school structures and education, we must not forget the experiences of children we are in school as those changes occur. The children and staff in Valley School all conducted themselves with an admirable steadfastness in the face of all of this adversity and change. Nevertheless it is worth questioning the ways in which they experience these changes, and the ways in which their experiences and well-being can be improved. The viewing of their experiences through the lens of space provides a useful and insightful way of assisting this process, as it allows for the full material-discursive complexities of school life to be appreciated. Whilst this does not point to easy solutions, it can inform research, policy and practice when it comes to understanding the experiences of children in under-pressure school in deprived areas of the UK.

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